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STAGING QUEER FEELINGS:
THE AFFECTIVE ECONOMY OF FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY
AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

"Staging Queer Feelings: The Affective Economy of Fashion Photography at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century" tracks the circulation of queer feelings, moods and atmospheres in alternative fashion magazines in the 1990s and 2000s. It explores, in particular, how *Dutch* magazine (1994-2002) challenged the aesthetic conventions of mainstream fashion imagery and normative understandings of the body, by suggesting alternative ways to perform masculinity and femininity and imaging queer ways of inhabiting the world. My case studies are fashion editorial stories depicting post-teenage grunge anomie, working-class "obscenity" and intergenerational intimacy. The dissertation argues that through the staging of ambiguous sexual scenarios and styles of bodily performance previously unseen in fashion imagery, magazines like *Dutch* advanced visual discourses on sexuality, affect, and social life aimed at the dissolution of heteronormative representational conventions in the visual culture of fashion at the turn of the century. In addition to contesting beauty standards and norms of decorum, alternative fashion magazines provoked the readers to question their own sensibility and moral positionings, in this way establishing a new mode of spectatorial engagement among fashion magazine readers. Based on extensive analysis of fashion editorial spreads circulated in the alternative press, the dissertation develops the argument that the fashion photographic image since the mid-1990s has functioned as an interface for the creation of queer world possibilities and the formation of fashion magazine counterpublics. In contrast to other scholars who have used semiotics or psychoanalysis for the study of fashion images, my dissertation employs queer affect theory as a magnifying lens for tackling issues of intimacy, emotional life, and inequality in collective human experience. The project ultimately unsettles dominant (heterosexual, upper and middle-class) histories of fashion imagery and identifies fashion photography as a rich, under-investigated archive for contemporary queer and affect scholarship.

LAY SUMMARY

Looking at the fashion photography produced at the turn of the twenty-first century, this dissertation unpacks aesthetic feelings and atmospheres which I refer to, loosely, as "queer" because they express a sense of emotional and social detachment from institutionalized "normality." The archive of images analyzed in the dissertation is provided by a fashion magazine called *Dutch* (1994-2002). The fashion editorials hereby examined (depicting disaffected teenagers, working-class youth, and ambiguous children) show subjects in the act of performing unconventional styles of masculinity and femininity that challenge heterosexual middle-class expectations. These subjects, and more precisely their styles of fashioning, question the conventions of fashion photography, such as its promotion of aspirational body ideals and the circulation of happy feelings. Based on an analysis of fashion photo spreads circulated in the independent fashion press throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the dissertation argues that, beginning in the late 1990s, the fashion photograph became a peculiarly queer outlet for creative expression among fashion photographers, stylists, and editors, as well as a site wherein magazine readers could identify with a certain queer sensitivity and develop an imaginary community. The project ultimately interrogates dominant, elitist histories of fashion and shows how fashion photography produced at the margins of the mainstream constitutes an important queer archive.

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PROLOGUE

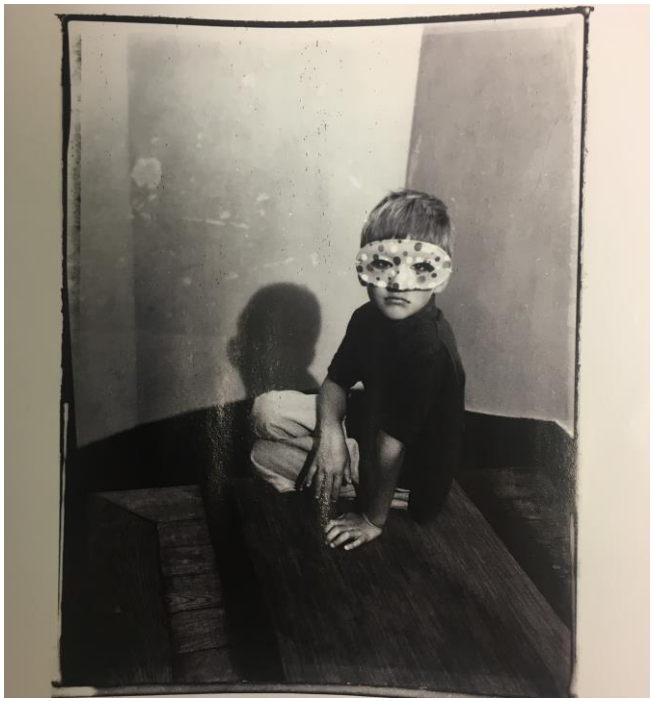

Figure 1. Photo by Sonia Ana Lievain, *Dutch* #14, 1998.

When I came across this photograph, published in 1998 in a now defunct fashion magazine called *Dutch*, the affective charge of my long involvement with fashion images was triggered by a glimpse that confused and disoriented me. This glimpse instilled doubts and questions that guided my curiosity and became the object and material of my intellectual commitment. The picture was taken by a photographer named Sonia Ana Lievain, about whom little information is available apart from scarcely documented freelance commissions for French newspapers. I resisted my impulse to investigate further. This image, in the end, was not fit for my research (or so I thought): it did not look like a *fashion* image, it was not shot by a fashion photographer, it was not part of a fashion spread (it belonged, haphazardly, in a photographic portfolio dedicated to "youth"), and its presence within the magazine issue appeared awkward, unjustified. Its seeming unfitness persuaded me of its unworthiness: it was discardable, bound for the desktop folder where emotionally resonating pictures that did not make it to the final round of my case study chapters ended up.

Over the last couple of years, I found myself going back to it, grasping new details that seemed to have suddenly appeared from the dark shadows in the picture. Every time I opened the JPEG file of the image, I was hit and moved in ways I could not work out. I would focus for

minutes on the wooden strips of the floor, or the confusing angles of the wall, the shadows, the traces of the chemical stains from the photographic development, and the body of the child in the photo, finding myself getting physically closer to the computer screen to try and grasp what had hooked me in the first place. Slowly, I began anatomizing those details, trying to memorize them and keep them with me. I did not show this picture to friends and colleagues, as I did with many others that were or were not included in this dissertation. For some reason I felt vulnerable about being subject to the affective capture of the image. The picture revealed something about my identification with this child that I did not want to share. It also stimulated an interest in the self-imposed limits of my intellectual scrutiny. Notwithstanding the psychic workings of my personal engagement with this picture and my attempt to retrace the trajectory of my emotional response and meaning-making practices, I came to recognize that my relation to this image was one of queer affect. The queerness of this image, by way of the affective resonance it exerted on me, had made it an object that felt too personal to be investigated in a dissertation. I thought I needed some distance from my object of study to be able to analyze it properly (which may seem paradoxical for a dissertation largely informed by affect theory).

In writing this prologue, I pay tribute to that image for having subtly and yet consistently animated my dedication to the exploration of the affectivity of fashion images. This picture, without my knowing it until the very last stages of the writing process, opened up the questions that have underpinned not only this dissertation but also, in hindsight, a longer history of my engagement with fashion photographic material. What made this image queer for me? Where is its queer affective "power" located? The limp wrist, a gesture embedded with a history of both gay shaming and campy reclamation, the fingers pressed on the wooden floor as if to ensure groundedness and safety, the legs horizontally pressed to each other sustaining the forearm and producing, in their self-containment, a certain mannerism, the polka dot mask, the head which only in its shadow reveals its tilt, the dark zone that blends the line between the floor and the wall (is that a closet?), the twistedness of his posture and the overall obliqueness of the image (the very spatial descriptor of queerness): regardless, or precisely because, of these composing elements, the image works as an aesthetic conveyor of queer affect. The experience and re-experience of its felt capacity of impingement convince me that fashion images can articulate feelings evoking queer forms of life.

INTRODUCTION

> Instead of translating, or reducing the artwork to meaning, criticism's mission is to open it up to translation of a different kind, where space becomes shared and affect can flow. [...] Because art appeals to the senses as much as it does to the intellect, its recalcitrance to the divisions of academic disciplinarity offers a model of how interdisciplinary thinking can enrich each of the participating disciplines. [...] In this polyphony of disciplines, the one boundary most in need of melting is that between intellectual and affective work.
>
> Mieke Bael, "What if? The Language of Affect," 2007

Beginning in the mid-1990s, fashion magazines sitting somewhat at the edges of the fashion system began circulating provocative photo stories that gradually "queered" the visual field of fashion. These stories appeared to be shaking the elitist aesthetic scripts of fashion iconography: they staged unglamorous fashion scenes in which models-characters exhibited a higher degree of corporeal agency compared to conventional sittings and used their bodies in ways that confronted heterosexual and middle-class understandings of subjectivity. "Staging Queer Feelings" argues that these photographic narratives aimed to unsettle and rearticulate the fashion magazine readers' relations to issues of class, gender, and sexuality: it explores, through a close examination of the visual discourses produced by *Dutch* magazine (1994-2002), how the fashion photographic image at the turn of the twenty-first century became a political site in which mainstream visual culture was challenged and critical modes of spectatorship among fashion magazine publics could flourish. Affect is used in this dissertation as a heuristic for understanding and examining the fashion image, while the project as a whole is contextualized within a larger philosophical framework: affect theory is employed as a mode of inquiry against the backdrop of a queer aesthetic philosophy. The introduction will (i) sketch out the terminology; (ii) situate my research in relation to the studies on affect relevant to my investigation of fashion photography; (iii) explain my methodology; and (iv) lay out the historical and geographical coordinates of the research project as well as its object of study and its structure.

i. The Doing of Affect

In my writing, I follow queer theorist Ann Cvetkovich in her use of the terms affect and feeling "in a generic sense," where affect is "a category that encompasses affect, emotion, and feeling, and that includes impulses, desires, and feelings that get historically constructed in a range of ways" (2012: 4). In this strategic non-specificity, Cvetkovich prefers the term feeling for it maintains "the ambiguity between feelings as embodied sensations and feelings as psychic or cognitive experiences" (4). I employ the rubric of affect to refer to the feeling states that are figuratively inhabited by fashion models-characters, namely to how these are performed through gestures and poses, as well as to the sensations that certain representations might engender in the viewer. In this sense, affect is embodied, performed, and relational. Whereas I recognize the descriptive functionality of distinguishing between the terms affect, feeling and emotion according to a tripartite model wherein "feeling" is understood as a personal (or biographical) state, "emotion" as being social, and "affect" as pre-subjective (Shouse 2005),[1] I do not rigidly subscribe to it: I often use affect and feeling interchangeably, although I find myself privileging the term "affect" for it more malleably traverses these nominal boundaries and retains an important emphasis on the relational as this pertains to aesthetic experience.

"Affective economy" in the title conjures the idea that affect circulates: it moves and spreads through bodies and objects. Feminist theorist Sara Ahmed has laid out an "economic model of emotion" according to which emotions "work as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced only as an effect of its circulation" (2004a: 120). According to Ahmed, affects exist as a result of their circulation through bodies and/or objects; they are constitutively relational. In such an affective economy, emotions "do things": they involve subjects and objects and align individuals and communities through their attachment.[2] I deliberately adapt this emphasis on the social and material aspect of affect to the landscape of fashion photography with which this dissertation is concerned in order to indicate how aesthetic feelings are transacted between image makers, photographic

[1] On the distinctions among "affect", "feeling" and "emotion," see Massumi (2002); Hemmings (2005); Gorton (2007); Blackman and Venn (2010); Gregg and Seigworth (2010); Pedwell and Whitehead (2012); Blackman (2012); Pedwell (2014a).

[2] Through this formulation, Ahmed suggests that emotions are not simply psychological dispositions inasmuch as they are mediators between the psychic and the social, the individual and the collective.

features, and fashion magazine readers, and how, in this way, they spread across an aesthetic, a social, and a psychic domain. It is this affective circulation that shapes the aesthetic sensorium of fashion photography.

This dissertation is not interested in pinning down definitively how affect "works,"[3] as much as what the affects that emerge in the aesthetic experience of fashion images *do*. How are queer affective registers embodied and performed in fashion photographs? And how can they be taken up and mobilized by the viewers? The research project is guided by these key questions. As my writing unfolded, other more politically laden questions have surfaced as lines of inquiry for my interests in affect and fashion imagery: in the face of normative and rigidly coded representations of "positive" and "negative" feelings perpetuated by mainstream fashion media, what is the queer aesthetic, social, and political potential of fashion images? What can fashion images do? Can they be marshaled to envision a queer affective community? The attempt to answer these questions led me toward a wider issue: how could we, through the investigation of queer feelings in fashion photography, activate ideas of queer attachment and belonging in order to rethink our modes of relationality, namely, how we stay together as a collectivity?

As I will explain in the first chapter, I embrace a view of aesthetic experience as an affective encounter that exerts its impact by bringing potentialities that are enclosed within the world into being. In the footsteps of Jean-Luc Nancy and José Esteban Muñoz, I will argue that in the encounter with the image queer senses of the world that exist *in potentia* can be disclosed. From this vantage, art is about the production and experience of an affect-event which might bring about the possibility of alternative ways of looking at, or being in, the world. Seen this way, affect may seem unlocatable, almost floating in the ether; but, in my view, the aesthetic relational encounter between viewer and image is also an encounter with the very affect-filled elements that compose that image.[4] Images are indeed mediators of moods and feelings: aspects such as composition, lighting, setting, and of course the

[3] On the workings of affect, see Massumi (1996; 2002); Sedgwick and Frank (1995); Sedgwick (2003); Gibbs (2011).

[4] In art and cultural criticism, authors inspired by Deleuze and Guattari have argued that the aesthetic work is a creative act of actualization of the virtual (intended as the realm of the affects) (O'Sullivan 2006), an event through which not yet existent ways of being can be engendered and alternative realities can be brought into existence (hoogland 2014). In the first chapter I arrive at a similar understanding of the artwork by venturing on an alternative theoretical trajectory. On the relationship between affect and event, see Berlant (2007a; 2008b; 2012); for a philosophical discussion of event and aesthetic experience, see, among others, Deleuze (1969); Lyotard (1971); Badiou (1988).

photographed subject, instigate modes of affective encounter with the viewer, and it is precisely the shared affective capacity to notice and respond to these affective inputs that potentially unites the viewers in a *sensus communis*. This dissertation advances the claim that by way of a collective attunement to queer modes of feeling in the experience of viewing fashion photographic images, (queer) counter-imaginaries can be mobilized.

Affect theorist Jonathan Flatley writes that mood sets the scene for our affective attachments to objects. In order to affect an audience, authors (or other aesthetic producers) must be able to create "an object of affective attachment" that resonates with their public's "mode of attunement"; in other words, an aesthetic work or practice needs to "attune itself with that audience's mood" in order to be able to affect the audience and, potentially, to cause a transformation in mood (2008: 24). Following Heidegger, Flatley stresses that moods are relational and collective (2017: 145), as he writes: "*Stimmung* is a collective, public phenomenon, something inevitably shared."[5] Moods give us a sense of the situation we are in collectively: "that this is historical, specific or situated knowledge makes it no less useful in a practical sense"; in fact, "it is by way of mood that we can find or create the opportunity for collective political projects" (Flatley 2008: 20-23).

As happens more generally in everyday life, where our mood prepares the situation for our affects to arise, in our aesthetic experiences the mood we are in orients our affective relations with and attachments to particular objects. We might also say that the mood in which we find ourselves in in the first place sets our openness to being affected (what Nancy calls "affectability"). While acknowledging the importance that our moods have in our aesthetic experience, the arguments of this dissertation also rest on the belief that images themselves *have* moods and feelings that are mediated to the viewer through material

[5] In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger noted that the ontological interpretation of affects in the philosophical tradition had fallen under the rubric of psychic phenomena; to counter this tendency, he reformulated affects as constitutively entangled with the world, thus seeking to provide them with an existential-ontological foundation. He did not explicitly conduct an investigation of affects; however, his extensive reflection on moods (*Stimmungen*) and attunement (*Gestimmtheit*) placed affective experience at the center of existence. For Heidegger, in our being in the world we are always *already* in a mood: we are constantly "attuned" to situations according to our moods (which can change and henceforth impact or shape a certain situation). We are "assailed" by moods in the sense that these emerge from our own existence: they stem "from being-in-the-world itself as a mode of that being" (Heidegger 2010 [1927]: §29, 133) and we tune all our everyday experiences based on them. In other words, to be in a mood *is* to be attuned to the world. The "attunedness" of our being shapes our encounter with the things of the world: it is the very presupposition and the medium by which we go about life. We are thrown into a world in which moods function to set the frame of our emotional experience. Moods are hence atmospheres in which we are steeped rather than interior conditions (Blattner 2006: 77).

conveyors, or vectors. Any aesthetic work addressed to an audience, in fact, seeks to envelop such audience in a certain "affective atmosphere." [6] In the case of a fashion photo story, which is a genre that relies heavily on figuration, arrangements of bodies and objects are composed, to a large extent, by the image maker, and affects are experienced by the spectators also, in part, as a result of an encounter with the forms that shape the atmosphere within the image. In other words, we might say that in the aesthetic engagement with a fashion photographic narrative, the affects that might arise for the viewer are "facilitated" by the atmospheric tonalities of the images. The fashion image has an affective atmosphere of its own, which is obtained through a particular orchestration of bodies, clothes, props, lights, and setting.

The moods and atmospheres of a fashion image, as the case studies will demonstrate, are not coincidental: the styling operations of bodies in a fashion photo shoot—including the postures, facial expressions, and clothing of the models—imprint a certain atmosphere into the photographic image which can be apprehended by the viewer as intensities and resonances. In this respect, a fashion image holds an "affective power" as a result of the aesthetic work of the creative personnel behind the camera. Cultural theorist Ben Highmore's statement that "moods and feelings are a form of labour" (2017: 2) echoes here. The affective labor performed by cultural intermediaries such as photographers, stylists, and models is crucial for the material production of fashion images. Admittedly, although the bent of image makers is to manipulate material components in order to generate a certain effect, the viewer's affective response to a particular image might be quite different from what is originally expected.[7] Additionally, while the mood of an image or an artwork can be experienced collectively, it still resonates subjectively according to our singular affective disposition, taste, or familiarity with the cultural form in question.

Moods can also be historically specific to a certain aesthetic genre, with its own conventionalized forms. To use an example pertinent to my object of analysis, the mood of 1990s independent fashion photography can be said to be, generally speaking, gloomy and reflective as opposed to the cheerful and lighthearted moods of 1980s commercial fashion

[6] Cultural geographer Ben Anderson (2009; 2014), inspired by the phenomenological reflection on aesthetic experience of French aesthetician Mikel Dufrenne, theorizes affective atmospheres as emanating from the ensemble of elements that compose an aesthetic object while at the same time overflowing its representational content: seen in this way, atmospheres communicate themselves by arousing a feeling in the perceiving subject, who, in turn, apprehends them and reworks them in lived experience.

[7] I think this point is cognate with cultural theorist Sianne Ngai's warning against confusing the "tone" of a text with the reader's experience of it (2005: 43).

imagery. The aesthetic mood of a picture, or set of pictures, can be a refraction of the social and cultural world in which such pictures have come into being. In some fashion photography from the 1990s, the pairing of a particular style of clothing, such as a "grunge" ripped flannel shirt and leather boots, with a certain bodily aesthetic, such as skinny and waifish, mediated a collective feeling of disaffection wrought by the economic crisis of the early years of that decade. Of course, the feelings that photographic narratives set out to exude do not emerge in a vacuum but are the result of a recognition made possible by our familiarity with the historical and social ties that make certain forms resonate.

ii. Photography and Affect

From a perspective informed by affect theory, to experience a photograph is to feel its resonances: to foray into the invisibility of the image, that is the level of experience that could circumvent the rational decoding of the photograph. The relationship between photography and affect is expressed in the ability of photographs to stimulate simultaneously the psychic and the somatic, and therefore to stir a response that supersedes passive contemplation and instead privileges action (Phu and Steer 2009). This understanding resonates in the queer readings of Roland Barthes's theory of the photographic image (offered by photography scholars such as Shawn Michelle Smith, Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu). It was, in fact, in the footsteps of *Camera Lucida* (1980) that queer affect made its appearance as an analytic in photography studies. Barthes came to terms with affect by expressing his frustration with the limits of psychoanalysis and semiology for the study of images and resisting any reductive system of interpretation in favor of a more open and personal sentimental approach (1980: 8). In *Camera Lucida* he proposed a mode of inquiring into photography through feelings. In order to find and "feel" his mother, who had just passed away, he looked at photographs of her in which objects charged with affect—her dressing table, a powder box and a chair—enabled him to recognize her history.

As art historian Shawn Michelle Smith explains, Barthes sought to do more than merely record the emotional effects of the images: he suggested "affective intentionality" as a mode of approaching a photo. That is, affect became for him a lens through which to grasp an image: Barthes intended to use affect as a tool for "seeing through" a photograph (Smith

2014). This affective method requires not only attending to one's own feelings when looking at a photograph, but most importantly using these to unearth the multiple, ever-shifting and at times non-transparent meanings of photographs themselves. Furthermore, Barthes famously established a well-known distinction between two modes of experiencing a photo: the *studium* is the cultural participation in an image, that is, a relation moved by intellectual interest and curiosity, whereas the *punctum* is the event through which a detail of a photograph pierces our attention, keeping us emotionally within its contingency; the *punctum* is "a kind of subtle beyond" (1980: 59), a gesture that moves us outside of the visual boundaries of the photograph pushing us to see and feel what is beyond the visible. In her work on *Camera Lucida*, Smith advances the idea that Barthes's reflection on photography articulates in a haptic language of feeling (in that his own experience of photographs is a tactile one of "being touched") a queer theory of the photographic image wherein "feeling opens the index onto other worlds, collapses disparate times, and conjoins the material and the spiritual" (2014: 31). Barthes's theory of the *punctum* questions the idea of the photograph as a locus of meaning and opens it to the viewer's affect. As I will discuss at length in the first chapter, an affective approach to photography might project the viewers' desire past what is visible in the picture, making it possible for them to imagine "elsewheres" beyond the photographic frame.

In their turn, in the volume *Feeling Photography* (2014), editors Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu draw largely on Barthes to theorize feeling (a term they use interchangeably as a synonym for affect) as an analytic for thinking about photography. Feeling, they explain, was an epistemological problem for the photography criticism of the late twentieth century, which posited the photograph as a material product which could be understood only in relation to the ensemble of structures through which the photographs were created and distributed. Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, in contrast, distanced itself from neo-Marxist and structuralist accounts of photography by way of habilitating "feeling as an ontological requisite for photography" (Brown and Phu: 3). In response to accounts offered through the use of tools derived from historical materialism, discourse analysis, and psychoanalysis, a critical engagement with the affectivity of photographs might unfold alternative modes of thinking through images beyond their ideology and signification. Barthes's queer sensibility, which Brown and Phu see in the evocative sensuality of the *punctum*, in his affinity with people of color and feminine figures, as well as in his very refusal to name said sensibility, inspires the

development of investigative approaches that foreground the imbrication of feeling and queerness. From this standpoint, the rubric of feeling promises a fruitful engagement with photographs by paying attention to previously uninvestigated questions of gender and sexuality.

In the wake of the "affective turn" across the humanities and the social sciences (Clough and Halley 2007), the relationship between affect and the clothed body has begun to be explored within fashion scholarship; yet, an affective approach to the study of fashion photography has been largely overlooked thus far in favor of more established ones (e.g. psychoanalysis and semiotics). The existing affective work on fashion photographs is largely informed by the reflections of social theorist Brian Massumi;[8] in addition, the growing impact of neuroaesthetic research on the field of visual studies that commenced in the late 1990s has also reverberated on the study of fashion images.[9] Along these two trajectories, photography theorist Eugénie Shinkle has employed affect as a critical lens in the examination of fashion photographs, trying to elucidate how images can affect the viewer and how the viewer by being affected can be prompted to action. Affect, she explains, "provides a way of thinking about images in terms of their *effect* —not just what they signify or communicate [...], but what they *do*, the kinds of sensations that they produce in the viewer" (2011: 168).

In her analysis of the representation of the playful female body in fashion photographs since the 1930s, she explores how those images sparked the viewers, by channeling and

[8] Breaking with post-structuralist discourse theory, and strongly influenced by Spinoza and Deleuze, Massumi (2002) elaborates a vitalist account of affect: he theorizes affect as non-conscious and dynamic bodily intensities that precede and are independent from language and emotion, and thereby resist structures of meaning. He situates affect, intended as immanent force, within an area of indeterminacy between thought and action. Emerging prior to and outside of cognition, these intensities are "incipient action and potential": they have the capacity to impinge and "move" bodies in multiple ways. A rethinking of the body as both an actual and virtual realm of potential ensues (30). Thus, affect, for Massumi, offers a way out of the boundaries of signification and representation set by cultural theory and concerns the matter of bodies experienced in a dynamic process of becoming.

[9] in the early 1990s, neuroscientists who took up the task of studying neural correlates described the workings of aesthetic perception from a biological perspective. The work of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (1995) paved the ground for a better understanding of the relation between body and emotion by demonstrating not only that emotion forms a significant part of our cognition but also that it is inextricably connected to our body. Moreover, the research of neurophysiologists Giacomo Rizzolatti and Vittorio Gallese on mirror neurons laid the foundations for comprehending the role of the body and the emotions in our experience of visual representations, i.e. how we experience an image emotionally. By studying the neural mechanisms that underpin empathetic feelings and the embodied simulation activated during the contemplation of an image, they were able to illustrate "the felt bodily engagement of the spectators in their responses" to images, namely the quintessential and dynamic role of empathy and emotion in our aesthetic experience (Freedberg and Gallese 2005: 198).

modulating moods and affects, to subscribe to prevailing ideals of femininity, hence urging them to act upon their own body, an affective instrument regulated by the mode of feeling expressed in the image. Shinkle recognizes that the fashion image is a cultural actor that needs to be understood not only for what it signifies but also in terms of what we, as an audience, do with it. She writes, "It is in the *mattering* of perception that images become political: paying attention to the affective and embodied dimensions of image perception can lead to new ways of understanding how such images can embody not conformity, but political divergence" (2013: 85). I praise Shinkle's approach for it ultimately points to the idea that it is through processes of embodiment triggered in our affective relation with the image that we might come to think and act critically in the world. Images "touch" us and "move" us: they move us in the twofold sense of both moving us emotionally and, as a consequence of our affective involvement, inducing us to act.

While I share her commitment to understanding the *effects* of visual images on the viewers' bodies, my method for the study of fashion photographs is motivated by other concerns. Whereas Shinkle's interest in "*the primacy of the affective* in image reception" (Massumi 2002: 24) leads her to concentrate on how photographs modulate affect between the viewed and the viewer, my interest shifts the focus to how fashion images can function socially and politically precisely through the affectivity they mobilize. In my reading of fashion photographs, I attend to how the affective arrangement of fashion images may invite affective relations with the viewer that have social consequences (depending on what we, as viewers, *do* with them), and, more specifically, how they can spur resistance or cause disturbance to heterosexist teleologies. Moreover, a critical reading grounded in affect permits us to investigate not only how bodily sensations can come to matter, but also how specific affects, mediated through pictures, can be revealing of a particular "structure of feeling" (Williams 1977)—a concept which, in my understanding, describes how a set of social changes in a precise historical situation can manifest itself in the attitudes of a given group of people, formally registering as (shifts in) manners, language, dress, or style—[10]and finally,

[10] Jonathan Flatley glosses Raymond Williams's complex concept of "structure of feeling" as "the mediating structure—one just as socially produced as ideology—that facilitates and shapes our affective attachment to different objects in the social order. [...] When certain objects produce a certain set of affects in certain contexts for certain groups of people —that is a structure of feeling" (2008: 26). On this concept, see also Highmore (2017).

how we might come to feel part of an affective community based on our sharedness in the sensitivity expressed in the images.

With this aim in mind, my inquiry into the visual culture of fashion is inspired by queer affect theory, with its conceptualization of affect as a magnifying lens for tackling issues of intimacy, emotional life, and inequality in both subjective and collective human experience. Within queer studies, in fact, affect is investigated as an interface for the somatic, the aesthetic, the social, and the political: queer affect theorists set out, albeit from different angles, to trace how affective forces can shape, or be shaped by, social and political ones, and to scrutinize the role occupied by specific feelings in culture and society. To be more precise, I am primarily interested in how the encounter between certain fashion photographic images (with their own affective atmospheres) and viewers can mobilize a queer affectivity by means of which new senses of the real can be envisioned. I want to look at how the staging of particular scenes in fashion pictures through the use of the camera, the fashion styling, the setting, and the models' movements can prompt a queer emotional engagement with these images and inspire the imagination and consideration of different life possibilities. It will be my argument that fashion images, in their material-affective arrangement, can mediate queer aesthetic feelings that can be circulated among viewers, having an effect that surpasses aesthetic pleasure.

iii. Visual Images as Agents of Change

Studying visual images through the lens of affect makes possible the deployment of hermeneutic strategies that attend to how affectivity is mobilized in the encounter between the image (and the bodies in the image) and the viewer, and how said affectivity may mobilize action: this action can take the form of an embodied transformation for the viewer or, as I explore through the dissertation, it might prompt a questioning of one's own affective and moral positioning in relation to issues such as community and relationality (in Chapter 3), class and decorum (in Chapter 4), and intergenerational kinship (in Chapter 5), and ultimately put forward alternative dispositions toward the world. On the relationship between visual images and social change, affect theorist Carolyn Pedwell argues that aesthetic engagement with visual images can engender forms of care, attentiveness and connection that lead to

"affective inhabitation": in fact, "sensing can be turned into an activity that engages the possibility of transformation at the level of habit" (2017: 163). In Pedwell's account, it is "through the ongoing interaction of 'the affective' and 'the habitual'" that forms of transformation can materialize: change might not be brought about by the singular encounter with an image, however it can occur through the repetition and accumulation of our affective responses, interactions and habits (164).

Fashion images are cultural forms that can both register shifts in attitudes and feelings and disseminate them toward our material world. In my exploration of alternative fashion photo stories, I argue that although this genre does not directly advocate any kind of social change or action that the readers-viewers might intuitively materialize and sustain in their everyday life, a change can nonetheless take place. These photographic narratives, in fact, can give expression to modes of embodiment and moods that cause a disturbance in the reproduction of a particular regime of visuality wherein only certain kinds of bodies and "transparent" feelings (e.g. joy or sadness) are legitimized. Fashion photo stories, which constitute the object of study of this dissertation, are a peculiar genre inasmuch as they are often inspired by cinema, or cinematic ways of looking at reality, and yet they are a very different medium: they are evocative, but much less burdened than narrative film by the necessity of a beginning or an ending and therefore of occupying a moral position.

A posture, a glance, or a gesture can be, to different degrees of legibility, carriers of queer resonance. Social and sexual histories, in fact, can be traced in bodily enactments, but this does not mean that the affective power of an image is exerted only on viewers who have a direct experience of that history. As both queer affect theory (e.g. Dinshaw 1999; Nealon 2001; Love 2007) and Barthes's work demonstrate, affects can activate relationality even across time. Resonances are transmitters of knowledge, in the sense that through their apprehension the viewer can make sense of a certain image or artwork in new ways, which often diverge from the dominant narratives and understandings of that same cultural object; the viewer can be singularly attuned to an image and might have a sensible affiliation with others who are imaginatively part of the same affective community. Moreover, the affective force of fashion images from the past can also be retrieved by the viewer in order to critically

engage with the present.[11] Photographs are performative agents that can be socially mobilized beyond their original material context.[12]

In the face of this interest in the bodily experience of images and their capacity to act as agents of change, my analysis of fashion photographs is concerned with two aspects: on one hand, how affect can be used, *à la* Barthes, as a tool for thinking about images beyond the boundaries of signification; and on the other, how fashion photographs might be taken as vectors for experiencing the world creatively and "queerly." With affect as an analytic lens, my project conceives of fashion photographs as platforms for the mobilization of collective queer feelings and modes of looking that can animate unforeseen orientations toward the world. Thanks to their affective capaciousness, fashion images avail themselves to be used as a scaffolding for meditations on queer life.

In my exploration of the aesthetic arrangements of fashion photo stories, I adopt an approach that is equally attentive to the moods of the images and to my investment in what I believe is at stake in them. My own affective entanglement with the research object, in fact, is a constitutive component of a project of cultural criticism aimed at bringing queer visuality into play for a reflection on non-normative ways of being. Each photographic narrative scrutinized in the dissertation entails a gesture of "queering"—by which I mean a questioning of the habits, expectations, and codes that govern different axes of identity—that I unpack by examining the image makers' work of manipulation of bodies and signs (parsing how certain effects and dislocations are obtained through the use of the camera or the styling of the bodies on set) as well as how the reader-viewer can come to be affectively engaged.

As a critical discursive-material practice, my reading aims to bring to life fashion photo stories as media that participate in social life in view of their capacity to provoke dis/identifications in the viewers and intimately speak *to*, speak *of*, and possibly even shape

[11] This is resonant with visual culture theorist Lisa Cartwright's idea that to track the affective exchange between viewers and photographs is to inhabit a sociopolitical space where spectators across historical time and geographic space can be connected and use the photos in multiple ways (2015).

[12] Photography theorist Elizabeth Edwards writes that photographs "have a performativity, an affective tone, a relationship with the viewer, a phenomenology, not of content as such, but as active social objects" (2001: 8-18). What Edwards is pointing to is an affective extension beyond the semiotic, the possibility of an aesthetic experience that via the viewer's imagination may have an impact beyond itself. She argues that photographs "move as tactile objects around groups of people [...] eliciting both effect and affect" and they "become embodied within social relations as active constituents of social networks": in this sense, photographs are also social agents (Edwards 2012).

publics. Queer theorist Antke Engel describes this process of bringing to life a visual image as activating "*the image as a research agent*," by which she means that through the adoption of "a complex and oscillating notion of the image as picture, metaphor and imagination," we can construe the image as contributing "to the production of knowledge and theory-building as well as to the transformation of established relations of power and desire" (2019: 338-339, 345). She maintains that in order to illuminate the social productivity of images, we need to understand ourselves "as being part of the image, that is, residing in an assemblage of images, bodies, signs, affects, and objects" and we need to think and speak *with*, rather than *about*, the image (346). As Jacques Rancière also contends, images can confront the very conditions of possibility of what is granted visibility within a certain discourse and can rupture the tissue of ordinary aesthetic experience, henceforth designing new ways of inhabiting the social (2007).

In my dissertation, sensible life and social life are imagined in a continuum: fashion images are not seen as pertaining to an artistic domain split from the social or the political; on the contrary, they participate in the making of the sensible experience that both impacts and reflects the social and the political. More precisely, following Highmore, who departs from an understanding of feelings as dematerialized and construes them instead as "form-giving social forces," i.e. as agents of history and potential change, I am interested in how the "formations of feelings" encountered in fashion photo stories, "suture us to the social world" (Highmore 2016: 145). Visual fashion images, due to their cinematic qualities and atmospheric tonalities, often obtained through sophisticated styling and set design, seek to have an emotional impact on the viewer and increase (to use the terminology of Spinoza and Deleuze) our capacity to be affected.

In attending to the affectivity that fashion images mobilize, I probe how these images might queer our understandings of sociability: in Chapter 3, for instance, an existential feeling of disaffection is imbricated with an apathetic, disengaged apolitical stance; in Chapter 4, in a scene of capital abandonment, sensual exuberance becomes a response to the anxiety of non-belonging and disassociation from the public sphere; and in Chapter 5, ambiguity and ambivalence are muddy registers through which an enriching encounter between childhood and adulthood can flourish. This approach incorporates the lesson of affect theory in calling for new discourses on non-identitarian communities and modes of being together, that is, the envisioning of new possible, livable configurations beyond critical theory's attachment to

subjectivity. In this way, affect theory offers a method of inquiry: it foregrounds an intimate engagement with the object of analysis as an attempt to unfold the affective dimension of aesthetic, social, and political phenomena. Through this optic, the affective can be framed also as a queer process of knowledge formation. Affect theory ventures into how cultural and aesthetic objects—in the case of this dissertation, fashion images—propagate affects that can be both telling of the lived experiences of their publics and, more interestingly, stimulate for them new ways of being and inhabiting the world. Under this light, critical research and writing *on* and *through* affect is also about aesthetics and politics.

My claim is that the fashion photography discussed in this dissertation is also political in that it cultivates queer sensibilities that may expose alternative life versions and kindle new orientations to the world. Fashion photography, as a visual medium, is especially suited to exhibiting and even anticipating shifts in relation to how, for instance, ways of looking and being are formalized in a given historical context; in this process, fashion oftentimes reveals the stratifying citational practices through which certain tropes are brought back from the past to delineate present ways of appearing. In thinking affectively through fashion scenes, I engage not only with their forms and tonalities but also with the gendered, sexualized, and racialized framing of the bodies that occupy the stage. My endeavor is to read the moods of the images while simultaneously addressing the politics of the corporeal relations among the bodies of the models that organize the scene. Thus, I approach fashion photo stories as aesthetic formations that have not only affective resonances but also political consequences (in the sense in which politics and aesthetics are interdependent). In engaging with photographic images as "scenes" rather than "objects," I privilege the indeterminacy and mobility that characterize them as sites of affective emergence. In this view, I am inspired by Lauren Berlant, when she says: "Once we see that an aesthetic encounter is a training in converting objects to scenes […] we become queerly aestheticized, alive in curiosity about what had seemed a fateful object, and with political implications" (2011b).

By occasionally inhabiting a certain affective ambiguity and indeterminacy (as will be most evident in the final case study in Chapter 5), I refrain from reducing the images to a fixed position and a definitive interpretation, and I seek, instead, to keep my research object mobile and stress the richness of its emotive content. As Pedwell, influenced by Sedgwick and Spivak, argues, "Tarrying with contradiction and ambivalence *is* the mood work that cultural theory must continue to pursue, both in order to understand the material implications of our own

emotional investments in intellectual production and to appreciate the complex ways in which power operates within the structures of feeling of late liberalism" (2014b: 61). I see my research project as participating in this "mood work" through an excavation of the queer affectivity and imaginative possibilities of a photographic genre (the fashion photo story). More precisely, I will "sense out" the changing features of the fashion photographic narrative at the turn of the twenty-first century, demonstrating how a shift in fashion's aesthetic sensorium can be observed in the material organization of clothing style, the physical appearance of the models, and other factors that comprise the material-affective toolbox in the fabrication of a photographic scene. Affect, thus, is also employed in the dissertation as a diagnostic tool for assessing how the interweaving of aesthetic, social, and political forces that make up a certain fashion imagery can become perceptible to the viewer and can disclose the *Stimmung* of a particular historical moment.

Following queer studies scholar Dina Georgis, who posits that "queer affects are the affects that refuse security" (2013: 16), in the sense that they eschew a cognitive appraisal that ties them to a predefined social understanding of community and belonging, I suggest that tarrying with the ambivalent, the unfamiliar, and the uncomfortable in the analysis of aesthetic scenes may turn out to be an intimate reading experience through which one can get to grips with the knotty affective relationship with the structures, ideas, and images upon which our social being rests. Georgis writes:

> Queer affect offers an opening to thinking, as that which unravels the self in relation to the self's known world. Queer affect may perform the transgression of norms, conducts, and habits, but what makes it of interest is not rebellion but how it presents an emotional occasion for learning. […] What would it mean to see learning as a practice of tolerating ambivalence? […] This is a learning made from the encounter with the hard-to-name affect and therefore involves making a relationship to the otherness of knowledge. Learning, in this sense, is the crisis of not being able to hold on to what you think you know and bearing it enough to make way for insight. (16-17)

My inquiry into the aesthetic and affective politics of fashion photography keeps a distance from an engagement with the "hard feelings" such as shame, resentment, rage, and grief (Sender 2012:207) that have had a long representational history in the visual culture of fashion and have been given scholarly scrutiny in queer studies, and attends, instead, to less legible feelings. Attention to what appears difficult to locate and stuck in indeterminacy may, in fact, herald valuable insights into our affective relations with fashion images. My queer

reading of fashion images is an interpretive operation advocating a queer affect politics which, in accordance with contemporary affect theory, wishes for a richer and more open vocabulary of experiences. In the larger context of the research project, a discussion of what Berlant calls "the affective register of aesthetics" (2015a: 80) motivates me to anatomize the imbrication of affect and aesthetics as regards my object of study: precisely, the relationship between the aesthetic of a certain image and its affective tonalities as well as between the photographic subjects' bodies and the feeling states in which they are displayed; in other terms, the corporeal "uses" and gestures through which certain embodied feelings are encoded and transposed in the image. Thus, I take pains to unpack the mutual implication of the affective and the aesthetic in order to track how "queer feelings" are articulated.

Drawing on queer theory, affect theory, and aesthetic theory, I survey the aesthetic politics of queer feeling in alternative fashion photography, unpacking issues of queer affective performativity, visuality, community, and world-making. This dissertation, which can be situated in the domain of visual culture studies, deals with theoretical concerns from queer and affect studies, fashion theory, photography studies, and philosophy. By exposing the fecundity of fashion images in their enactment of queer feelings, and, more broadly, their capacity for articulating narratives which have the potential to disrupt aesthetic imaginaries that consolidate social outlooks on the world, I assert the importance of encompassing fashion photography within the repertoire of genres that both queer and affect scholarship look to as a viable object of study, and I argue that fashion photography can stimulate counterhegemonic imaginings and thought-provoking engagements with aesthetic, social, and moral discourses.

iv. The Visual Field of Fashion (1994-2002)

The timeline of this dissertation, which follows the editorial history of *Dutch* magazine, the main archive for my study, coincides with a period of late liberalism in which politics, activism and legal changes in Europe and the United States reverberated in complex ways in the circulation of LGBTQ discourses across fashion media. The "post-crisis" period in the history of AIDS (Kagan 2018), initiated by the effectiveness of highly active antiretroviral therapy in the second half of the 1990s, brought a sense of relief to the LGBTQ community. This relief,

however, lay upon a certain disillusionment and frustration with how local governments had failed the community by dealing with the epidemic through moralizing about gay sexual practices. This period of collective emotional exhaustion coincided with the deflation of radical energies within gay activism and the consolidation of political practices reliant on civil rights arguments, which proved particularly viable in liberal societies with regard to the attainment of judicial and legislative reform: this led to a domestication of LGBT politics, the alignment of the gay community with governments on the grounds of newly gained citizenship rights and, often, its integration into mainstream state systems, with major corporations looking more and more at gay and lesbian subjects as a financially exploitable constituency (Seidman and Richardson 2004: 16-18).

Reflecting a new gay consumerist ethos in the context of a proclaimed social equality, European gay magazines like *Attitude* (1994-), *Têtu* (1995-2015) and *Instinct* (1997-2015) began promoting the "homonormative" lifestyle of white, urban and affluent subjects to the exclusion of people of color, working-class subjects, and transgender individuals. The alternative fashion magazines that emerged on the market in this period, in contrast, displayed an approach to issues of class and sexuality that was more open and inquisitive compared to the generally heteronormative mainstream fashion publications (such as *Vogue*, *Elle*, and *GQ*, just to name a few), which, instead, had been consolidating a visual field wherein neoliberal narratives of autonomy, individualism, and self-improvement—what media scholar Joke Hermes, in her work on British and Dutch women's magazines, calls "the liberal individualist repertoire" (1995: 101)—fueled the fantasy that self-actualization could be attained via the fulfilment of consumerist desires. Alternative publications were not completely integrated within the commercial fashion system and, as I will show, entertained a complex and at times contradictory relationship with it. Deriving much of their inspiration and cultural energy from independent forms of cultural production, they sat on the edges of the larger dominant visual public sphere and were largely resistant to a homogenization of bodies and styles, while simultaneously not entirely severing their link with the industry.

"Staging Queer Feelings" seeks to demonstrate, through a critical analysis of visual discourses circulated in the form of fashion photo stories, that it was precisely within a seemingly depoliticized cultural and artistic environment that alternative fashion magazines, without making any direct political claims, began to stage figurations that disturbed the overarchingly static visual culture of fashion. Despite this dissertation not being a strictly

historical project, my discussion of the visuality of photo stories at the turn of the twenty-first century illustrates the counter-normative form that fashion image-making assumed in this particular period in time. I look at the fashion photo story as a medium through which important yet neglected affective, aesthetic and political work was being conducted by critical fashion intermediaries. Having conducted extensive research on alternative fashion magazines from the 1990s and early 2000s, I selected as my privileged archive *Dutch*: a Dutch magazine that was only in print for eight years (from 1994 to 2002) and that has never been the subject of scholarly research.

In the dissertation I explore how *Dutch,* without explicitly addressing LGBTQ publics, featured photo stories that reinvigorated discourses of class, gender, and sexuality; hence it intervened within important debates on the relationship between fashion imagery and society, on the representation of disenfranchised subjects in fashion cultures, and on the characteristics of fashion magazine spectatorship. By showcasing the experimental work of photographers who were shooting, for the most part, street models in unglamorous settings, *Dutch* carved out a space for subjects who had been traditionally obscured by mainstream fashion media and devised narratives that undercut standardized representations of, and relations among, bodies in the visual culture of fashion. In the mid-1990s, minimalist designers such as Raf Simons and Hedi Slimane were acquiring notoriety in the fashion scene for counteracting the glamorous excess of the 1980s with an aesthetic inspired by the moods of punk. Meanwhile, couture-oriented fashion designers such as Alexander McQueen, John Galliano, and Viktor & Rolf were blurring the boundaries between fashion and art, putting together theatrical collections and runway shows whose performative elements and rich historical references defied the preconceptions of fashion as a merely commercial business by engaging with issues of sexuality, religion, and mental health.

Dutch was founded in the Netherlands (and was printed exclusively in Dutch) but, after only a few years, it was acquired by a major publisher and began circulating in English throughout Europe and the United States, with most of its personnel working between the two continents. Because of this geographical dislocation, in my discussion I take into consideration both the publication's initial locality, i.e. the cultural coordinates of the Netherlands, and, more broadly, a Euro-American visual public sphere informed by anglophone artistic knowledge and popular culture. I look at *Dutch* in relation to both the European culture of independent fashion magazine production and a broader globalized

fashion scenario imbued with transnational creative energies. The overall aesthetic of the magazine, in fact, was widely inspired by the music, art, and cinema that flowed in the international networks of cultural production in which the creative personnel of the magazine were participating.[13]

In the Netherlands, the 1994-2002 era, which corresponds exactly with the run of *Dutch*, was a period of innovative social legislation—comprising the ban of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in 1994, recognition of domestic partnership for same-sex couples in 1998, and, for the first time in Europe, the legalization of same-sex marriage, in 2001—brought about during the tenure of Prime Minister Willem "Wim" Kok (1994-2002). Yet, in 2002 homosexual and far-right politician Pim Fortuyn formed a populist party (LPF) which quickly became one of the largest in the country: the party unanimously identified Muslims as a threat to freedom in the liberal Dutch society and encouraged drastic positions against multiculturalism and immigration while simultaneously standing in grand support of gay civil rights. The assassination of Fortuyn (2002) had a dramatic impact on the reconfiguration of the Dutch political landscape: an exponential growth in popular consensus with the far right and a drastically reduced flux of migrants ensued. Critical theorist Fatima El-Tayeb contends that the sociopolitical climate in the Netherlands was emblematic of a particular conjunction, shared by the majority of western countries, in which a neoliberal restructuring of society was joined by ethno-nationalist sentiments. In her words, "[T]he increasing pitting of the (implicitly white) gay community against the (implicitly straight) Muslim community posits the former as a victim of the latter, creating further common ground between neoliberal and white supremacist interests" (2012: 82). This was consistent with the rise of nationalism throughout the 1990s and the ascendance of populism as a political force, with right-wing populist parties becoming established in the legislatures of various western democracies.

[13] It must be noted that Europe has a long tradition of cutting-edge style magazines (such as *The Face*, *Arena*, and *i-D* in the 1980s and *Purple* and *Self Service*, among others, in the 1990s) whereas in the U.S. non-mainstream fashion publications have a less solid and linear history (with *Interview*, founded in 1969, and *Paper*, in 1984, considered the precursors of the genre). Nevertheless, the American fashion industry, thanks to its extremely profitable system of modeling agencies, designer companies and its close relationship with the movie industry and celebrity culture has been a fertile territory for the success of experimental fashion photographers who were able to rely on production budgets that were much higher than those of most creatives operating within the European fashion industry.

Within such a convoluted scenario, the mainstreaming of homosexuality became commonplace in Dutch filmmaking and television, where sexuality was approached as just another component of a permissive society, one with a very loose link to activism (Smelik 2006: 421). This was part of a broader tendency in the media landscape of the 1990s, where the rise in representation of gay and lesbian content was also a way to expand the gay consumer market and cater to upscale gay audiences, beginning with the economic recession of the early 1990s. In the world of fashion, power houses like Calvin Klein began marketing some of their products, particularly fragrances, as gender-neutral, and androgyny (embodied by iconic top model Kate Moss) swiftly entered the mainstream cultural imaginary (Cavalcante 2018: 54).

With regard to the fashion imagery of the time as well as the migration of gay imagery into the mainstream, *Dutch* appeared free and daring, privileging non-normative performances of masculinity and femininity, and stylistically raw settings. Its photo shoots became a space for creative teams of photographers, stylists, and editors to think critically, through fashion (or, at times, as I will show, without fashion), on all sorts of matters, from the mundane to the existential. It should be acknowledged, however, that despite its intersectionality on the level of class and sexuality, its visual narratives remained predominantly white. Models of color are featured in *Dutch* much more frequently than in other fashion magazines from the same period; nevertheless, like 1990s queer popular culture as a whole (Cavalcante 2018: 54), it did not offer a major platform of expression to racialized minorities. This could be explained in light of a general absence of inclusivity-policies in the fashion industry at the time (an absence for which modeling agencies were largely responsible).

In looking at fashion photo stories published in *Dutch*, the dissertation examines how they opened up queer aesthetics detached from the paradigms of hyper-masculinity/femininity and androgyny which were dominant, respectively, in the 1980s and the early 1990s, as well as how they indicated a way out of the visual rhetorics of dominant fashion imagery, that is, from the "set of highly orchestrated representational practices" through which discourses of coherent femininity and masculinity are naturalized in the visual cultural realm (McRobbie 1999: 77). Matthias Vriens, the former editor of *Dutch*, in a recent podcast interview has criticized what he calls the "structure of femininity" of mainstream fashion photography, which dates back at least to Guy Bourdin's anti-feminist, artificial

depiction of uber-powerful women in the 1970s. This structure, or ideology, of femininity can still be noticed in today's glossies, whose "schizophrenia," in Vriens's words, consists in advocating "diversity" in some of their written content while still promoting an unshakable, consolidated feminine image that despite being offered for consumption to women has to be equally appealing to (straight) men (Scherer 2020).

Fashion photography has historically entangled normatively aspirational bodies, donning upscale designer clothes, with highly staged attitudes encompassing the joyful, the sensual, the dégagé, and the melancholic: a taxonomy, albeit partial, of affective registers that has become key in kindling the consumer's enchantment with fashion representation. Glossy fashion magazines have typically functioned as material signifiers of social status and upward mobility, shaping and disseminating commercially palatable appearances as aspirational aesthetic ideals. As cultural theorist Angela McRobbie explains in her Bourdieusian analysis of the "image industry," *Vogue* magazine's "commitment to fashion as art and as luxury consumption for upper middle-class women" has shaped the structure and conventions of fashion magazine production. It has done this by evoking fantasies of beauty, wealth, lifestyle, and female (hetero-) sexuality in order to "appeal to the features of taste and distinction by which particular readers are addressed as a means of confirming their class, status and cultural capital" (1998: 162-163).

Archival research into alternative fashion magazines from the 1990s, instead, unearths photo spreads—often informed by feminist and porn zines as well as by indie music and New Queer Cinema, with its eschewing of "positive imagery" (Aaron 2004: 4)—that featured "perverse" subjects in a variety of settings, celebrating defiance of aesthetic and moral norms as well as expressing fascination with lives on the margins. The fashion photo stories that I discuss in this dissertation are involved in a queer disorganization of the protocols of "emotional intelligibility" (Berlant 2015b: 195) that sustained and continue to sustain the conventional, iterative production of regulated and contained subjectivities in the larger visual culture of fashion. I am particularly interested in parsing the feelings that registered on the fashioned body of the models-characters in these fashion photographic narratives; how in the context of the visual and affective economy of fashion imagery at the turn of the twenty-first century such feelings diverged from the rhetoric of happiness and desirability that pervaded mainstream culture; and finally, how these feelings were communicated to the spectator.

The dissertation is structured in five chapters. The first chapter constitutes the philosophical framing of the project. Here I engage with the thought of French philosophers Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Rancière to reflect on the world-making potential of the photographic image within a broader discussion on the relationship between aesthetics and politics. I address the semantics of affect adopted by the two philosophers and I put them in a dialogue with queer theory in order to assemble a conceptual terminology which will be used throughout the dissertation. I explain that by producing fashion imaginings, fashion photography molds an aesthetic imaginary that can either shore up or unsettle the hegemonic values held in place in a given society. Fashion photographic images may allow for sensory worlds to appear and, in so doing, they posit the very conditions for identifications among their publics, bringing into view objects that animate their affective investments. The fashion image, as happens with other artistic forms, is a medium through which consensus or dissensus can be staged, and by way of a shared collective mood, communities of sense can emerge. I develop the argument that fashion photography is a largely unexplored queer repository of feelings, one that can set forth "queer senses of the world" by way of binding viewers through collective disidentifications and disorientations from established aesthetic norms and patterns of representation: by presenting subjects who had been previously excluded from the representational field as well as by staging queer forms of feeling and relationality, the fashion images circulated by alternative magazines in the timeframe of my discussion brought about disagreement with standardized, legible visuality inflected with normativity. The purpose of this chapter is to ground an analysis of fashion imagery in a political aesthetics wherein visual images have the potential to connect viewers, attuning them to queer sensitivities and calling forth different capacities for existence.

Chapter 2 introduces the object of study of the dissertation: the fashion photographic narrative, or photo story. Here I investigate this aesthetic genre in its relationship with cinema and documentary photography, unpacking its key themes, subjects, and aesthetics. I then move to the history and economy of production of the alternative fashion magazines that circulated from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, highlighting the contribution of magazine editors and stylists in the construction of an alternative field of fashion representation. This chapter, in mapping out the domain of fashion editorial photography, traces how alternative publications expanded the taxonomy of masculinity and femininity and endorsed queer aesthetics and sensibilities. More precisely, after sketching out the socioeconomic contours

of alternative fashion photography and pinning down its structures of feeling at the turn of the century, it shifts attention to the queer labor undertaken by the editors and image makers of *Dutch* magazine in order to redesign the visual field of fashion as a scene for creative possibilities of (what Rancière calls) political subjectivization.

Chapter 3 is the first case study chapter of the dissertation. Here, looking at a fashion photo story inspired by a documentary film from the early 1990s, I address disaffection as the queer feeling of being out of joint with normative life. I discuss how, in the photo spread, disaffection is performed through a neutral, indifferent attitude toward the world, and how such neutrality can be read as a mode of disassociation from living in alignment with the structures that enable the reproduction of life as we know it. In the photo story, disaffection provides an opening for a consideration of what it means to be in life without being politically invested in life's fantasy objects. I propose that a neutral a/political stance translated into relinquished sociality can invite a rethinking of what it means to be together in a collectivity. Engaging with themes of community and temporality, especially via the work of Roland Barthes and Lauren Berlant, the chapter discusses how a withdrawn style of being in the world is conveyed through forms of self-fashioning that index disaffection. The chapter reveals fashion photography as an aesthetic practice through which social relationships can be reimagined and through which new terms of operation beyond the social scripts that are already in place can be envisioned. It demonstrates how photo stories published in a magazine like *Dutch* were beginning to circulate queer counter-moods, inviting readers-viewers to engage with social, moral, and emotional issues from which fashion photography had historically distanced itself.

In Chapter 4, a photo story depicting "white trash" subjects in the act of defying middle-class proprieties of dress and manners serves as the focus for a critical exploration of shamelessness as a performative register through which working-class bodies figure as agents of social sedition. The unglamorous and confrontational bodies in this photo story enact a parody of professional fashion models by means of exhibiting an exuberant, uncontained sexuality that cuts against the codes of good taste and decorum. After unpacking the reticent underperformance of dissociative feelings in the previous chapter, here I am interested in deciphering the political effect of an overperformance of corporeality through prosaic, bawdy gestures. Engaging with Giorgio Agamben's reflections on gesture and profanation, I discuss how the unboundedness of the bodies in the photo spread constitutes an affront to the

regime of productivity from which they are excluded. The case study suggests that feelings of social exclusion can be converted into a provocative gesturality which threatens to alter the hierarchical social dynamics between covetable bodies and "disposable" ones. This chapter, more evidently than the others, reflects on fashion magazine spectatorship and calls for a politically committed rethinking of the aesthetic consumption of fashion images.

In Chapter 5, which concludes the dissertation, I explore how fashion photography has historically played a crucial role in the formation of cultural imaginaries. In particular, the chapter is interested in how fashion images can be used to interrogate ideologies that have framed the child as a disembodied, unsullied figure bereft of agency, and offer, instead, a vision of childhood as a queer, creative, imaginative ground where lateral fantasies and affective relations can be formed. *Dutch*, in fact, advocated complex and nuanced ways to engage with fashionable representations of children and tweens, exceeding trite narratives that construct the act of photographing children as voyeuristically sexualizing or paranoidly sanitizing. The chapter examines a photo story, featuring a young girl and shot by a female, feminist, erotic photographer, wherein the atmosphere of the scene as well as the model's own movements on set register as ambiguous, inscrutable, and elusive. Ultimately, the case study points to how fashion photo stories published in alternative magazines have used indeterminate affect to interrogate dominant imaginaries and unsettle structures of legibility, and how they have also provided a stage for a reconsideration of the ways in which bodies (of the models, the photographer, and the spectator) can come together to form intergenerational bonds.

Sitting at the intersection of different disciplines, this project contributes most evidently to the fields of queer studies and fashion studies. On one side, queer studies, which encompass affect and emotion in their scope of research, have tended to privilege analyses of literature, film, the performing arts and new media, while disregarding fashion and fashion photography;[14] on the other, fashion studies, which only recently have begun to incorporate affective methodologies, have been lacking a queer terminology and toolset for the investigation of gender and sexuality through fashion representation. The dissertation reveals the important role that late 1990s and early 2000s alternative publications played in queering

[14] Elspeth H. Brown's latest work (2019) on queer fashion photographers and models constitutes a felicitous exception.

the visual culture of fashion as well as in reconceiving the practice of fashion image-making as intimately involved in the formation of queer sensibilities and reading communities. Lastly, it provides a critical methodology for the study of fashion imagery by bringing attention to the aesthetico-political productivity of alternative fashion publications in their advancement of discourses on affect, sexuality and class, and hopefully broadens the purview of queer studies by casting the foundations for the writing of a queer history of fashion magazine culture.

CHAPTER 1

The Queerness of the Image

> What interests me is the way in which, by drawing lines, arranging words or distributing surfaces, one also designs divisions of communal space. It is the way in which, by assembling words or forms, people define not merely various forms of art, but certain configurations of what can be seen and what can be thought, certain forms of inhabiting the material world.
>
> Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 2007

In this chapter I map out the theoretical framework of the dissertation, developing the argument that the fashion image functions as an experiential interface for the creation of queer world possibilities. As I am going to explain, the fashion image is an operative repository of affects that can be shared and circulated to form, in Lauren Berlant's terms, queer "affect worlds" (2004a: 450). The fashion image will be subsequently explored and discussed in the following chapter and case studies. In this first chapter, I engage with the aesthetic philosophies of Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Rancière in order to provide a background for understanding the photographic image as a space for the production and sharing of "sense" as well as a venturing point for a critical reassessment of the sensible order (which Rancière refers to as the "partition of the sensible"). My consideration of the photographic image is framed within a broader reflection on the relationship between aesthetics and politics and the capacity of aesthetic practices to envision democratic assemblages. I will put the two philosophers in dialogue with queer theory: in this conversation, theoretical concepts such as "disorientation," "periperformativity" and "queer world-making," which have been elaborated by queer theorists, will be brought into focus in order to unearth the queer potential of the photographic image. Thus, I connect aesthetic theory and queer theory through an affective lens in order to explain how images can contribute to the aesthetic distribution of a queer sense of the world.

1.1 Sense and Disorientation

Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy of the image lays the groundwork for a reading of the fashion photographic image as a site of queer interrogation of aesthetic and affective paradigms. More precisely, his ontology of the image will allow me to theorize the fashion image as capable of opening up new senses of the world and imaginatively uniting viewers in a shared community of feeling. According to the French philosopher, the affective encounter with an artwork, whether it is a photograph or a painting, takes place at a threshold where the "contact" with alterity emerges: in this encounter we are caught, grasped, enveloped in the otherness of one another, entwined in our respective "strangeness" (2005: 106). It is precisely through this capture of singularities (i.e. the viewers) that the image operates a "spacing" that puts us into contact with each other, without however collapsing the subject's individual strangeness into a generality of sensual collective perception.

As will become apparent throughout this chapter, and as some of the terms I have used in the previous paragraph might already suggest, the rationale behind the adoption of a Nancean framework lies in its proximity to eminently queer concerns on the matters of aesthetics, ethics, and politics. Nancy's philosophy of the image is preoccupied with the recasting of an aesthetics rooted in affect that supersedes the intentionality of a humanist subject in favor of post-identitarian forms of collectivity. He does not view the aesthetic as conducive to the articulation of the subject's sense of self, but rather he tackles the aesthetic as a means of exposure to a commonality, or togetherness, that is proper to our existence: this relationality that art aims to bring forth allows for a circulation of "sense" that lays bare the possibility of different worlds. I would argue that Nancy's understanding of art as key to the unfolding of plural worlds as well as of art's operationality as a sharing of sense among singularities that neither annihilates individuality nor advances collective identitarian claims is aligned with the ethos of queer aesthetic praxis.

What is at issue for Nancy is the possibility of theorizing the photographic image as an ethical mode of exposure to being-in-common. In his view, the image turns us toward the other, thereby confronting us with otherness: we share the image with others and within this sharing (*partager*) we are put in touch. Thus, the image can be understood as grounding the constitution of the subject as a being-with in the very act of sharing in the other. Put differently, the image sets the scene for our being-in-relation (insofar as, according to Nancy's

social ontology, being is always being-with): it is a medium that engages us with (the alterity of) one another as a community, as a *nous autres*. He writes:

> The secret of the photograph, the very clear mystery of its being lost and straying, is its flight into the strange in the very midst of the familiar. The photo captures the familiar, and immediately, instantaneously, it strays into strangeness. By capturing its own straying, it leads what it captures astray. The photograph estranges, it estranges us. Between the subject of the click and the subject grasped, there is a coexistence without coincidence, or there is a coincidence without contact, or a contact without union (which is the law of contact). (2005: 106)

The image is a site of resonance wherein our bodies come together as a collectivity, albeit in their singularity, and are exposed to the body (or the "world") of the image: our senses become attuned to the image in a relation of resonance—Nancy in fact defines the arts as "modes of resonance" (1996a: 36)—or vibration, wherein our self is not a disembodied entity but rather a *corpus sensitivus* (2017: 79). Through visuality we activate all the other senses and we vibrate with the image as corporeal beings.

To further unpack this, for Nancy our *contact* with one another occurs through the image by way of a hallucinatory exposure to strangeness, that is, through a flight into the strangeness that is inherent to the familiar. The photograph defamiliarizes: it strays us into strangeness, estranging us from within the familiar. In this shared estrangement, we are (other from each other and yet we are) "in common": photography has, thus, the purpose of exposing us to a sense of community, which does not imply a communal fusion, but rather retains one's singularity in a shared aesthetic space. In other words, it is through a praxis of sense that we "compear," we come together, as a community wherein our singularity surfaces in the exposure to and with the other: community, for Nancy, refers to this sharing of the sensible, "the communitarian communication of the shared division of sense" (Eng 2013: 27).[15] This uncanny logic, which grounds the epistemic potential of the photograph in its constitutive intimate exposure, or exteriority, to otherness (rather than, say, in its indexicality) (Kaplan 2010) is coherent with a phenomenology of queerness that conceives of estrangement as a modality of disorientation from the linear temporality that organizes our lives.

[15] In *The Inoperative Community* (1991) Nancy derives the semantic of "exposure" and "communication" from Bataille, who sees the exposure to the other human being as the essence of human finitude, which he formulates in terms of "being-communication" (Nancy: 24).

Sara Ahmed explains how the concept of "orientation" can be put phenomenologically to use in order to tease out how bodies can be differently oriented in the world based on their sexuality, class, and race (orientation, as used by Ahmed, refers both to sexual orientation and to the "orient" of "orientalism"). Such an orientation enables bodies-subjects to forge relations and create spaces that can possibly disrupt normative arrangements. It is through our orientation in the world that we become proximate to certain objects instead of others. These ideas disclose the influence of Heidegger's thought, which is also central in Nancy's philosophy of being, in Ahmed's queer phenomenology: in both Nancy and Ahmed, the terminology of (dis-)orientation and (de-)familiarization is indebted to Heidegger. In *Being and Time* (1927) Heidegger speaks about disorientation (through the example of walking blindfolded in a dark room) as a way to explain the idea of familiarity with the world: it is through the feeling of familiarity that our body chooses in which direction to be oriented. Ahmed queers this idea by positing that orientation is also about finding one's own familiarity in the world: the question of orientation becomes a question of finding one's own way in the world, one's own sense of feeling at home, and, ultimately, shaping the world one wants to inhabit (2006: 7-8).

A queer subject can, thus, be oriented in directions (that is, toward objects) that defy the directionality that conventionally orients common ideas of thriving in the world (for instance through "objects" such as marriage and family). Moreover, one's disorientation also has an impact on other bodies' orientations, which means that queer inclinations toward certain objects, as well as the configuration of such objects in one's own life, can resonate with, or be disruptive of, others' own directedness (2006: 160). This insight endows affect with agency and intentionality, since, from Ahmed's perspective, we are not simply thrown into the world, but we can actively shape, queerly, our worldly arrangements by attaching to and being invested in objects that are telling of our desires.[16] She identifies "not fitting in," or discomfort, as a typical queer feeling deriving from "inhabiting norms differently" (2004: 155) and defines discomfort as a "feeling of disorientation" emerging when "one's body feels out of place, awkward, unsettled" (148). She intends this sense of estrangement and out-of-

[16] It is salient to stress that, phenomenologically, body and world are interlinked: they co-exist in a relation of mutual dependence. Thus, spaces are not exterior to bodies: the constitution of queer space occurs alongside, and concomitantly with, the orientation/disorientation of (queer) bodies.

placeness as a slippage from the norms that shape bodies and lives, i.e., a failure in reproducing those scripts by which queer people are nevertheless always affected.[17]

Following Ahmed, queerness is about those short or long-term instances in which the world is felt and experienced obliquely with respect to straight understandings (2006: 162). Taking from Ahmed's position, my stance is that queerness is ultimately about one's creative and affective disposition toward the objects of the world, that is, one's ability to performatively express desires, form attachments, and shape spaces, ultimately disturbing, phenomenally, the normative scripts that seek to regulate how such practices should be oriented. Simply put, "to queer" is to inhabit the world in forms that produce the effect of destabilizing norms of being, feeling, and acting. I have attempted to highlight how Ahmed's queer phenomenology takes the Heideggerian terms which function as a compass in Nancy's thought and twists them (or queers them) to elucidate the enabling capacity of queerness to make sense of our co-being in the world. Although Ahmed is not specifically concerned with the aesthetic or the image like Nancy, her reading of queer disorientation can inflect Nancy's theorization of the image as de-familiarizing and, as I will further explain, sense-making. Holding onto the presupposition that we are always already in a relation with the other ("being" being inevitably "being-with"), queer disorientation sets forth the possibility of imagining multiple and alternative modes of being-with *in* the world and shedding light on marginal affective configurations.

The experience of an image in its actuality is for Nancy strange and unpredictable inasmuch as each image retains its uniqueness and its distinct ability to produce different senses and orientations, and thereby resists categorical formulations. It exposes us to perceptual experiences that "make sense" in ways that cannot be logically or linguistically contained. For Nancy the image points us to an unsignifiable surfeit of affect that binds us in the sensual promiscuity of each other's alterity. According to literary scholar Adrienne Janus, by insisting on the perceptual performativity of the image (that is, on what the image does rather than on what it is), Nancy "shifts the terms of debate of visual culture away from performativity as a modality of discursive power relations toward performativity as a modality

[17] Merleau-Ponty had already explained that moments of disorientation are about an experience of disorder that may cause a sense of vitality or giddiness (2002 [1945]: 296). For Ahmed, phenomenological insights like this in the history of philosophy are already inherently queer in that they forecast the possibility of freely resignifying one's own directedness toward objects of desire. It is not a coincidence that queer is already, after all, a spatial term (meaning "twistedness") which gets translated into a sexual term (Ahmed 2006: 67).

in relations of pleasure" (2017: 3). Nancy, in fact, assumes that the image institutes a relationship of pleasure with us (the viewers): it involves us in the very act of aesthetic sense from which it emerges. This is not to say, however, that by way of our senses we are hedonistically immersed in the image just for the sake of experiencing pleasure; instead, by entering a relation with the image, we also enter a relation with a possible world disclosed through that image (Nancy 2005b). Each work of art announces a world, and we can come into contact with its "sense" (*sens*), or worldliness, via a relation of pleasure that embraces our senses. Thus, for Nancy the principle of pleasure is bound up not only with aesthetic but also ethical and existential implications: art is pivotal in the articulation of sense in the world.

By exposing us to possible worldly formations through the register of sensation, the image is not merely a representation but a "site of presentation" (Janus: 13). To figure, for Nancy, "is no longer to reproduce, therefore, not even to reveal, but to produce *the exposition of the subject.* To pro-duce: to bring forth, to draw it out" (2006b: 222).[18] It could ensue that the "reality" of the image is its very exposure to our being by way of a possible reorientation of our self in and with the world: sense is in fact for Nancy a "relation *to*," a "*being-toward-*something" (*l'être à-*) that is always "other" or "else" (1997: 7), namely a re-addressing of the self toward a sense of the world. The German etymology of "sense" suggests in fact "the values of movement, oriented displacement, voyage, 'tending toward.' [...] The process of carrying-oneself-toward-something" (12).[19] Because sense means being-toward, it unfolds different orientations in the world: it is a "tensor of multiplicity" and does not exhaust itself in either singularity or totality but instead maintains the relation of (co-)compearance of the subject and the world (88). Thus, sense is intended by Nancy as a praxis that is constantly taking place through the affective relations exposed and presupposed in art practices.

This Nancean account of sense, on the one hand, foregrounds the ability of the image to reorient the self in relation to "sense," which is consonant with the concerns of queer phenomenology; on the other, it seeks to deconstruct the logic of representation. Nancy, in fact, particularly in *The Ground of the Image* (2005) draws from Heidegger's notion of the

[18] Nancy's idea that art brings forth our being is probably inspired by Heidegger's theorization of *poiêsis* ("bringing forth," "emergence"). In the late stages of his work, Heidegger postulates art's capacity to afford an experience of relationality that resists, or is beyond, power relations. In this optic, *poiêsis*, as a distinctive character of the artwork, disposes our being toward a power-free mode of relationality (Ziarek 2002).

[19] It is important to specify, however, that "sense" for Nancy does not refer exclusively to a spatial orientation toward the world, "but also traverses the five senses, the sense of direction, common sense, semantic sense, divinatory sense, sentiment, moral sense, practical sense, aesthetic sense [...]" (1997: 15).

work of art as an event of truth in order to recast the image "as that which exceeds the economy of representation" (Eng 2013: 32): he harshly contests the view that images are representations of prior intelligible ideas, and contends, instead, that they constitute an affective mode of access to sense and thereby present new worlds on the grounds of a social ontology of togetherness. By way of exposing the singular to the other, the image alters representation: it dissembles resemblance via an exposure to *différance*. By postulating the image as an aperture to a collective praxis of sense-making, Nancy aims to deconstruct the metaphysics of representation, thereby unravelling the bridles of modern aesthetics, wherein *mimesis* was indeed a *doxa* (2005). In the last section of this chapter I will apply these reflections to the fashion image, and I will explain how this particular kind of image is more-than-representational and can disclose a world-making potential.

Nancy's theorization of the image as a "spacing" for the sharing and circulation of sense, in addition to relying on theoretical tools such as disorientation and defamiliarization, which may allude to a queer disposition to the world, is also strikingly resonant with queer considerations of affective periperformativity. The coinage of the term "periperformative" is owed to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Sedgwick pointed out that J.L. Austin's performative utterance "invokes the presumption [...] of a consensus between speaker and witnesses, and to some extent between all of them and the addressee." The performative statement is inherently normative insofar as it interpellates an audience whose consensus with the normative values that underlie the speaker's utterance is taken for granted (2003: 69). Sedgwick shifted the focus of the performative to the space and the audience surrounding the addressor and the addressee of a said utterance (such as "I dare you" or the "I do" of the marriage vow): this neighboring space is precisely where queer individuals might mark their disidentification from the invisible scripts enacted by state or religious authority as these are rhetorically subsumed in the performative utterance. In the face of the normativity embedded in performative utterances, Sedgwick's theorization of periperformativity is a queer attempt to "disinterpellate from a performative scene" henceforth unsettling the ideology to which our consensus is presumed (2003: 70). As a mode of disinterpellation, the periperformative indexes "the grammar in which affect and subjectivity can be explicitly brought into relation with issues of performative force" (Sedgwick 2011: 58). The salience of the periperformative lies in its capability to legitimize subjects to carve out a peripheral space of disidentification from the regulative chain of normalcy.

In photography, the periperformative refers to an imaginative affective scene that extends beyond and takes place "in the neighborhood" of the photograph's frame. Following Sedgwick's theorization of the periperformative as the "characteristic mode of attempted disinterpellation" (2011: 55)—that which exposes the structure and the normative force of the performative in its reliance on the consensus of the audience—and applying it to images, the scene of a photographic image can suggest an excess of sense beyond the boundaries of its framework which opens up other possible "senses" of the world. The periperformative spacing of the photo lets us imagine a proliferation of queer meanings and affects beyond the containability of signification: as an analytical tool, it can be put to work to explain that the parameters of sense as meaning can be undermined by atmospheric effects that envelop the spectators in a queer imaginary and modes of being together, thereby envisioning "new ways to attach to the world" (Berlant and Prosser 2011: 182). Art historian John Paul Ricco contends, in fact, that photographs can operate periperformatively for they gesture beyond the photographic frame toward a blind field of affective experiences (2014: 143). This *extra* of the photographic image licenses a mobilization of desire beyond the visible.

For Nancy, it is through affect that a new sense of the world can be grasped in the encounter with the image. He recuperates the Greek concept *methexis* (which is translatable as collective sharing or participation) to convey the idea of an affective participatory force that sensually entangles us with the image. *Methexis* indicates the affective participation (*meta*) in the desiring disposition (*hexis*) toward the *tonos* of the image: this is an ontological tendency of our bodies to vibrate with the image (2017: 76-77). In this participatory movement we share in our separation, we come together without, however, relinquishing our respective singularities: we share an aesthetic praxis (the participation in the aesthetic relation with the image) but we do not coalesce in one another; our singularities are not engulfed in a totality.[20] Nancy describes this attunement of *methexis* quite evocatively as a fascination in which we participate not as "subject[s] of an object" or as "object[s] to a fantasmatic subject" but rather as a "moment of the general motion of the world, [...] a

[20] It is worth underscoring that we, as viewers, maintain a distance from the image: Nancy does not argue for a fusion or a conflation of the beholder with the image, and it is precisely based on such a distance that the "spacing" opens up for us (that is, through this "cut" between us and the image to which we are exposed) new possibilities of sense. For a discussion of "cut" and "spacing" in Nancy, see Crowley (2017).

moment in the general commerce of the senses, of sentiments, of significances. This commerce, this communication, this sharing, this is what makes the image" (2017: 82-83).

Instead of deliberately dismissing *mimêsis*, i.e. the representational character of art, Nancy implicates *mimêsis* and *methexis* in one another (Michaud 2010: 85): there is no representation without a presentation of an excess from the given form as well as a participation in the circulation of a new sense; equally, there is no presentation without a (re-)production of communicable form. Nancy's ideas could help overcome the debate between the representational and non- or post-representational accounts of visual artworks by way of postulating, between (re-)presentation and affective participation, an imbrication that modulates the traits of a new sensibility that is always, to use Nancy's terminology, *in statu nascendi*, *in potentia* within the world. *Methexis* is a crucial concept for it implies that an affective participatory force *with* and *in* the image establishes a relation of modification and rearticulation with that image that lets emerge a sense of the world beyond the visible (yet still within the structure of the world). The affective relation to the image in the event of the aesthetic encounter brings forth the potential for a new sensibility to emerge; in other words, our attunement with the image brings forth a new sense of the world.

The event, in Nancy's aesthetics, is not a happening, or a taking-place. It is precisely the presentation, the coming-to-presence, the exposition of "world" and "sense" in their transitivity: in his own terms, "The event is presentation as gesture or motion, indeed as emotion, and as fractal ex-position: presentation as fragmentation" (1997: 126). The aesthetic event is the affective gesture that introduces plural possibilities of the coming to sense of the world. The affective nature of the aesthetic event is further unpacked by Nancy in a chapter of *The Sense of the World* (1997) titled "Aisthesis" (which notably refers to the Greek understanding of aesthetics as a theory of sensibility, rather than a philosophy of art). Here he advocates an aisthesis that foregrounds "affectability," which he defines as "the presence of sensible presence, not as a pure virtuality, but as a being-in-itself-always-already-touched" (1997: 128). Our being-affected and being-affectable by something is an affective "liability": we can be perceptually touched in an encounter because of our ontological exposure to sense.

Affect is, for Nancy, the actuality of "being-subject-*to*" (the being touched) of the subject (1997: 128-129). Thus, it could be said that for Nancy the *aisthetic* is the affective exposure of the subject *toward* sense. He recognizes that what has been left out by

contemporary considerations of art which call attention to either production or consumption is the "chance, event, birth, or encounter – which, in other terminologies, has been called the 'shock,' 'touch,' 'emotion,' or 'pleasure,' and which participates indissociably in both 'creation' and 'reception'" (1997: 133). I believe that it is precisely by foregrounding the affective-evental character of the aesthetic encounter that we can come to consider the ethical, political, and existential implications of engaging with art, and with images more specifically. By now, it should be clear how intricate the link between affect and aesthetics is in Nancy's ontological rehabilitation of the image: the image partakes, in fact, in an "ethics of praxis of sense-making, which is an ethics of the sensibility or 'affectability'" (Ross 2015: 142-143).

1.2 The Ontological Communism of the Photographic Image

Following this trajectory, the "sense of the image" does not consist solely in representing something; rather, the image, in enfolding us through the senses, presents us with "possibilities of worlds" (Nancy 2010: 93).[21] A new sense of the world (a new sharing of meanings) is "announced" by the artwork as world and image are enveloped in an ontological relation of co-presence, and such a sense is circulated intersubjectively as we participate, in our singular-plural being, in the *hexis* (disposition) of the image through a perceptual movement or "tension." Art, for Nancy, is always gestural because it opens "a form of the world": we are corporeally involved in a *mondialisation*, which is a circulation of sense that may not be grasped by everyone since it does not get reduced to being definitively signified (2007: 98). This can also be rephrased to say that art helps bring forth modes of our being-toward-the world. Through the energetic resonance of the artwork we vibrate with the sense of the world. From this vantage point, which privileges an ontological tension over a phenomenological intentionality (Nancy 2017: 76-77), the photographic image is not an

[21] Art has the capacity to produce sense as the constitutive meaning of being-together: in this optic, the photographic image functions as an entryway, a portal, or a modality of the circulation of sense that grounds our co-existence. Nancy construes art as constitutively pointing to a non-existent that is outside of the artwork, that is, to the possibility of sense, or forms of meaning, with which the work is in relation but that it cannot inscribe or appropriate. This gesture of "exscription" draws a spacing wherein a new sense of the world, i.e. the very possibility of its meaningfulness, springs up by way of the forms presented by the artwork.

aesthetic object offered to the eyes for a disembodied contemplation; rather, it is essentially a movement that seizes us and prompts us to attend together to the disclosure of a sense of the world. What is established by the artwork is, thus, not a relation to a "present thing" but the staging for a "coming-to-presence" of sense. Because of its power to expose us to a sense of the world, art is inherently agentive and transformative insofar as it ultimately sets the conditions of possibility for a sense of community to come into being.[22]

In Nancy's aesthetics, the methectic capacity of the image to unfold the communal essence of our being (that is, our being "singular-plural") as well as a sense of the world, does not seem to lay the ground for a political consideration of the image itself. The sphere of the arts for Nancy is, in fact, separated from politics, for the former is concerned with forms of being and the senses which do not fall within the domain of the political. However, as literary theorist Ginette Michaud remarks, Nancy's consideration of art as the making of a world inevitably interlinks these two spheres: for Nancy, democracy, exactly like art, never has a predetermined form, ground, or end, and "it is never an end in itself, unless it loses its most important sense, which is to never be achieved or accomplished already in a form, but always still to come" (Michaud 2010: 80). Democracy, in Nancy's understanding, "represents merely indeterminate sense, a sense that would remain indeterminate" and its configuration consists of a "being-toward in being-together" wherein no end or purpose of this directionality and relationality is identified beforehand (Nancy 1997: 90).[23]

The Nancean understanding of sense and the idea that there is an incalculable aspect exceeding politics that needs to be shared out have deeply informed queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz, whose theory of the aesthetic is particularly attentive to the role of affect in the shaping of the political. Following Nancy's intuition that the "sharing out" of sense is the

[22] Within this *aisthesis*, as Ricco cogently explains, the image is a space of "an intruding intimacy – [it] is always a threshold, an aperture, an opening." This is "the ex-static place of *compearance*, as the dis-enclosure of community" that exposes us to "the aesthetic, ethical and political partaking in our co-existence" (Kaplan and Ricco 2010: 6-7).

[23] On the grounds of Nancy's ontology of being singular-plural, the political is an incomplete gesture that "tries" new sense(s) of the world: it is concerned with the incommensurable pluralization of meanings and therefore with the indeterminate unfolding of worlds that are yet unseen, unrecognized, indefinite and "incalculable." The gesture of the political, as with that of the aesthetic, "can never 'be constituted' nor 'consist' in any image of totality, body, or system" and its value is to space out a space (*s'espacer*) that can neither be fully signified nor contained by laws, institutions or identities: it can betoken senses of democracy that have neither essence nor substance, for democracy is a groundless form that is constantly and potentially in formation (Michaud 2010: 81). In this sense, democracy, like art, "becomes an event, an event of sense, unique each time, awaiting to be remade in our being-together": it is constantly reinvented through our encounter with each other, which implies a sharing that is open and infinite in its unpredictability (Dejanovic 2015: 14).

constitutive mode of politics, Muñoz proposes queerness "*as a sense of the incalculable*" (2013a: 104): he means that we should think about queerness as a mode of togetherness that evokes a sense of the world which is incommensurate and cannot be finalized in terms of equivalence, incorporation, recognition, or assimilation of the one into the other. Queerness, following Muñoz in the steps of Nancy, is not a political dimension that projects an affirmation of otherness and the resolution of the dichotomies of self and other, singularity and plurality; rather, it is a sense of the nonequivalence that emerges from the trajectories and intersections among our respective senses of the world (108). The incommensurability of queerness is the very impossibility of reducing it to an equivalence of worldviews, of conflating plurality into singularity: it does not indicate transcendence but the proximity (and here a spatial dimension of queerness reinforces the idea of "sharing out") of our senses of the world. Such a proximity suggests a communion of incommensurate singularities, rooted in the principle of nonequivalence, which Muñoz refers to as "the communism of the incommensurate" (112): instead of prefiguring a community of equals, this form of communism would be a community of the commons that comes together in the unshareable sharing out of their singularities. It describes the sense of a world that ensues from the encounter of irreducible singularities whose plural worldviews come to forge a non-identical collective sense wherein everyone has a part.

The legacy of Nancy for Muñoz and queer theory in general can be pinned down to his intuition that, by positing community ontologically as a being-with, the logic of identity is to some extent destabilized: Nancy indeed invokes *différance* as a principle of heterogeneity in the making of a community. On the one hand, Nancy's community deconstructs the humanist model of identity and sociality, and on the other, it affirms as its main principle radical difference, that is, the very impossibility of a community predicated on oneness. A Nancean community preserves differences, in their being constitutively and productively irreducible and irreconcilable, as the kernel of togetherness. Thus, as critical theorist Nikki Sullivan notes, Nancy's theory of community resonates with a model that casts queer community as a deconstructive strategy for undoing and denaturalizing identities and institutions as well as "a fracturing process that enables difference and diversity and the radical unknowability of such" (Sullivan 2003: 148).

According to both Muñoz and Nancy, "communism" precedes the political: it is the actual presupposition for collective freedom and emancipation in the sociopolitical ambit. For

Muñoz in particular, communism is a conceptual instrument for shifting the queer political imagination from the register of the individual subject to the texture of the commons, which is made, *à la* Nancy, of "the multiple senses of plural singularities" (Muñoz 2013a: 113). In this sense, Muñoz's (idea of) queerness wrests itself from discourses of identitarian belonging in favor of an affective plurality of unleashed singularities whose sense of belonging lies in the sharing of an intrinsically diversified common field of experience. Inverting the terms of this discourse, it could be said that Muñoz's queerness is an analytical tool for the blueprint of a life in common based on non-equivalence. In the next section I will propose that this "sense of queerness" could be shifted more pragmatically, via Rancière and Muñoz on disidentification, to a plane of convergence of aesthetics and politics; however, I deemed necessary, at this juncture, to identify through Nancy and Muñoz the centrality of affect in thinking about the "being-together" in which the sense of our being-in-the-world as well as the sense of queerness (as an ethics of affective relationality) are grounded.

Returning to the focus on the aesthetic and embracing Nancy's line of thinking, I would suggest that the photographic image, in its ontological withdrawal from signification, designs possible and unpredictable democratic arrangements by way of bringing forth an ever-shifting sense of the world. As I have tried to evince, the fact that Nancy does not explicitly conceive of the image as a function within the political order does not preclude the prominent role that art plays, in his philosophy, in the generation of a sense of community. In Nancy's philosophy, in fact, as Ricco stresses, although the spheres of the aesthetic, ethical, and political are non-determinative of each other, they are nevertheless coextensive and related as separate registers of praxis (2015: 192-193). I have mentioned earlier that at the threshold of the image a community of singularities "compears" in that it becomes disclosed to itself as a being-in-common within an aesthetic space that reveals new world possibilities. In the event of the encounter with the image, multiple subjectivities are gathered, in the sense that they are exposed, in their finitude, to an experience of sharing and communication on which the "inoperative community" (*communauté désœuvrée*) rests.[24]

[24] In *The Sense of the World* (1997) "inoperativity" (*désœuvrement*) is explained in the context of aesthetics as the orgasmic quality or *jouissance* of the artwork, as the actual (simultaneously singular and collective) "e-motion and com-motion," the vibration or touch of its aesthetic gesturing toward-the-world, of its producing of sense (1997: 140-142). The inoperative community postulated by Nancy is a non-totalitarian collectivity devoid of teleological ideals and identitarian prescriptions, which concedes the "I," i.e. the subject, only in its ontological relation to a "we," i.e. others. The static idea of a community of subjects that are engulfed in a fusion that obliterates each individual's specific singularity is disrupted by Nancy in favor of a community of individualities

It seems to me that if for Nancy "the political is the place for the in-common as such," which means that it is "the place of being-*together*" (1997: 88), then the political is inevitably involved in the compearance of the self, in its constitutive relation with the other within the structure of the world, which is also fostered by the affective encounter with the artwork. In other words, with the premise that "we are together," Nancy's relational ontology, as this also frames the affect-event of our encounter with art, can become the terrain for replaying the question of the political in relation to possible reorientations of the world. I am not arguing that for Nancy a community can be formed by artistic practices, but rather that the communication and sharing among individuals enabled by the aesthetic suggests an intersubjective "sense" of our being in which the Nancean inoperative community is rooted. We exist in the world as already in a relation of being-with. Through art, such togetherness is exposed to the circulation of other senses of the world: it is precisely for this reason that it has been argued that the image is the test case for Nancy's relational ontology (Ross 2015: 149).

Yet, provided that for Nancy the ethico-political potential of art coincides with its inoperativity, how can the image (with *methexis* as an affective modality) be used in the project of imagining a community? How does the Nancean ethos and praxis of making a world relate to, and how can it further inspire, queer world-making? I suggest that the widely debated relationship between the aesthetic and the political in Nancy's work could be tightened through Rancière's insights on the distribution of the sensible and used in the praxis of queer world-making. By engaging with both Rancière's political aesthetics and queer theory it might be possible to bring into focus the aesthetico-political function of the photographic image in the formation of affect worlds. This will be relevant to understanding how the fashion image can participate in opening up a spacing for, or in "tracing out" an access (*frayage*) to, the disruption of affective and aesthetic norms.

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that are exposed to their being-together beyond the centric sources of the subject. In *The Inoperative Community* (1991) he begins his rearticulation of community by way of formulating a lexicon that "does not put into effect any community" (Esposito and Nancy 2010: 81). From "being-in-common" and "being-together," arriving at "being-with" or the pure and simple "with," his theoretical effort is directed at recasting Being in terms of relation and co-existence. This *co*-existential analytic is developed throughout Nancy's œuvre until its culmination in *Being Singular Plural* (2000) where the "with" (of "being-with") becomes the meaning of Being itself.

1.3 The Aesthetic as Political Gesture

Whereas Nancy inscribes his reflection on community within an ontological structure of "being-with," Rancière is suspicious about establishing an ontological grounding for the political, since in his view such grounding expresses a drive to keep people and things under control and thereby interferes with the process of repartitioning the forms that structure collective experience (which in his philosophy, as I will show, corresponds to politics). The goal of politics is, in Rancière's philosophy, the interruption of the "distribution of the sensible" through an intervention in the "police's order." For Rancière, the partition, or distribution, of the sensible is a legitimization effected by the ruling order of certain ways of feeling, seeing, speaking, behaving, and in general being in the world.[25] It can be taken as a key mechanism in the structuring of the public sphere. *Partage* is used by Rancière with the double meaning of "partition" and "distribution": on the one side the division between the possible (sayable, audible, nameable, etc.) and the impossible (unsayable, inaudible, unnamable, etc.), as well as between who is granted speech and visibility and who is not, and on the other the circulation and proliferation of certain forms of knowledge and visibility. The sensible is, thus, what structures common experience, and the political is precisely the debate over the sensible (in terms of who shall be included/excluded, who shall speak/remain silent, who shall be seen/remain invisible).

The reconfiguration of the sensible requires a political intervention that consists, chiefly, in giving voice and reinscribing in the aesthetico-political field the *dēmos*, or the *people*, i.e. those who are relegated to the perceptual margins of the community and therefore remain with no name, invisible and inaudible. Democracy, as it ensues, is the very presupposition of politics that must be accomplished through acts of "subjectivization" of the marginalized constituency in the attempt to reassess the partition of the sensible (Rancière 2004).[26] More precisely, with Rancière's own words: "Politics consists in reconfiguring the

[25] The "sensible" is the principle that weaves together the different orders (aesthetic, political, symbolic) of societies.

[26] Political subjectivization takes place when a group of people begins to speak for itself and thereby to enter the public space, which now has to account for a new voice. The process of subjectivization coincides, in Rancière's work, with disidentification, a concept to which I will return later in this chapter. It is a political emancipation of the minoritarian subject from the normative identitarian chains with which the state has relegated it to the margins (of "competence" and participation) in the social order. Its logic is a "heterology," i.e. a logic of the other, insofar as it implies the rejection of an identity that has been ratified by the ruling policy, which names the individuals in order to pin them down to specific spaces and tasks. "Being together" as new

distribution of the sensible which defines the common of a community, to introduce into it new subjects and objects, to render visible what had not been, and to make heard as speakers those who had been perceived as mere noisy animals" (2009: 25). Thus, for Rancière, politics is aesthetic in principle inasmuch as it pursues an ongoing reconfiguration of perception. In establishing a correlation between aesthetics and politics, Rancière is taking issue with Walter Benjamin's separation between the two as well as with his critique of the aestheticization of politics. Rancière reframes the Benjaminian debate by maintaining that politics actually partakes in a reordering of the population that is first and foremost aesthetic. In a nutshell, aesthetics and politics share the capacity to reshape the contours of the social world: in this sense, each aesthetic act is political and, vice versa, each political act is aesthetic in its attempt to reorder the world. Aesthetic and political gestures share their field of operation: the "senses" (to use the term normally employed by Rancière, which could also be substituted with "affect") that constitute the texture of the social world.

Rancière is also averse to Nancy's ontologization of community as a pre-political condition, for that obscures the political need of opposing the police order's orchestration of the sensible. By "police" Rancière means a regulatory system that divides the community into social groups with respective tasks and poses the coordinates for the distribution of the sensible (1995; 1999). The laws put into place by this policing order categorize and distinguish those who partake in the social order from those who are excluded: this separation relies on a prior aesthetic division (*le partage du sensible*) between the sayable and the unsayable, the visible and the invisible (and, I would add, what should be felt and how). I believe that what Nancy and Rancière share is the understanding of the necessity to locate sense, or the sensible, at the pivot of an aesthetico-political philosophy. Nancy, as I have shown, foregrounds the sharing and circulation of sense as the means through which to bring into focus the relational foundation of ontology (where "being" always presupposes the "other" in a relation of co-existence and co-dependence), and in this attempt the image is paramount because it constitutes the scene where this sharing of sense is made visible.

Such *partage* is similarly construed by Rancière, albeit with notable differences. While Nancy attends to the image with the purpose of recovering the being-with as the very motor

subjects means to assert everyone's equality and come together in one's "being *between*" (between identities, names, cultures, and so on), henceforth undoing the aforementioned regulatory order (Rancière 1992: 62).

and condition of human existence, Rancière sees in the image the site where a redistribution of the sensible might be accomplished. In other words, for Rancière the image is a function in the (re)ordering of the sensible insofar as it is an aesthetic enunciation that expresses a certain way of being, saying, feeling, or doing: as a "formation of re-imagining," the image is an aesthetic event which can either reify the dominant order or challenge it, in any case always operating on the sensible partition of the world (Williford 2009: 11-12). In both Nancy and Rancière the image attests to art's ability to produce, circulate, and share sense. However, for Nancy the image is instrumental to making "the fact of sense" visible, that is to say, to letting the being singular-plural that underpins our existence manifest itself on the level of the sensible, while Rancière is concerned with the power of the image to actually intervene in the organization of sensibility in the social order.

To reiterate this point, Nancy conceives of the image as a site for the exposure of the communitarian sense that shapes our finitude: it casts light on the inoperative character of our togetherness and reasserts the centrality of the sharing of sense as the very precondition of our existence. Rancière, albeit in agreement with Nancy on the prominence of the sharing of the sensible in the project of both aesthetics and politics, dismisses any ontological inquiries and highlights the potential of the image to interject in the current distribution of the sensible by way of offering a "dissensual" experience:[27] he calls this function of the image "dissemblance."[28] The image can activate "an operation of communalization" by dissembling the conditions of sensibility as these are posed by the dominant order (Rancière 2007: 34). It is a device in the redistribution of the sensible and therefore in the possible rewriting of community: artistic practices can give voice, by activating a process of political subjectivization, to the *people* who are not accorded recognition and representation.

In Rancière, art bears witness to the evolution of collective experience as well as its subversions, which make possible the gaining of visibility among minoritarian actors. It follows that aesthetic acts can be construed as "configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity" (2004: 9). Thus,

[27] Dissensus, or disagreement, generally indicates for Rancière a conflict over the delimitation of the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, the sayable and the unsayable. In other words, it is a dispute over who belongs and who is excluded in the partition of the sensible and suggests the necessity to articulate the claims of those who are left outside of the domain of the nameable.

[28] Nancy criticizes Rancière's idea that art might intervene in reassessing the organization of the sensible, judging it vague and metaphysical, and arguing that it is not clear where and how Rancière envisages this aesthetic intervention to take place (2009: 90).

the aesthetic imbues the political inasmuch as it contributes to accounting for who does and who does not partake in politics: to use Rancière's own wording, aesthetics "carries a politics, or metapolitics, within it" (2009: 15). Indeed, it is not concerned with a transcendental idea of the senses, but rather it actively takes part in the process of redefining experience in general (that is, the experience of what can be represented, said, seen, and so on): in this light, aesthetics is the reflection on the evolution of the sensible forms of our life in their relation with artistic forms (2007; 2013). This shows how in Rancière the active relationship between the aesthetic and the political is tangible, inextricable, and crucial in the achievement of equality and democracy.

For the purpose of this dissertation, shifting the reflection on the fashion image from the plane of ontology to the level of politics is instrumental in understanding how, in addition to uniting different singularities in a common sensorium, the image can actively contribute to the dissemblance of a preexistent aesthetic order and mobilize dissensus toward the troubling of said order. More precisely, art practices have the capacity to propose sensible arrangements that do not adhere to the sensorium shaped by the policing order, whose determination of the accountability of subjects is subsumed to the logic of intelligibility. The aesthetic textures devised through art forms can unite subjects by way of modes of apperception that defy the presupposition of intelligibility (and its dominance over sensibility) that holds together the tissue of ordinary (normative) aesthetic experience. The rejection of the distinction between form and matter, intelligibility and sensibility, is key for the formation of an egalitarian aesthetic community. From such a separation the partition of the sensible draws sustenance in order to pinpoint which genres are worthy of being included in the rubric of art, which subjects will be expected to engage with it, and therefore which modes of thoughts and relations are established between the arts and the people. According to Rancière, the institution of new forms of sensory experience appears "as the germ of a new humanity, of a new form of individual and collective life" insofar as, by suspending the dominant relations of visibility and discursivity posed by a non-democratic partition of the sensible, these aesthetic forms become generative of a world bereft of organizational relations, aiming toward the formation of a "community of sense," namely a community that is not glued together by consensus but by feeling (2009: 37).

What is common in *sensus communis*, in fact, is sensation: individuals are linked through a "sensory fabric" which delineates a mode of relationality, and the very remodeling

of this sensory fabric is political for it reconfigures a way of being together (Rancière 2008: 4). A Rancièrean community of sense is not a transcendental universalizing structure but a non-identical aesthetic formation that can vary according to the specific relations established between art forms and individuals. The constitutive part of aesthetic experience is referred to by Rancière in terms of "aesthetic affect" (2012: 18): individuals are impacted in their sensorium by an affect at the heart of which lies a "power of indetermination." This is to say that individuals experiencing art in the "aesthetic regime" share affectively the very contingency of the artwork (as well as, I would add, echoing Nancy, their own finitude in that very experience).[29] "Contingency," in this context, defines the quintessential character of the artworks within the aesthetic regime: they are open and malleable to being interpreted, evaluated and even reimagined.

Aesthetic affect is produced and circulated by artworks such as photographs and films "in order to redraw, with the relations of the visible and the sayable, the frontiers of the tolerable and the intolerable as well as those of the possible and the impossible" (Rancière 2012: 19). Aesthetic affect is indeterminate due to its contingency and, consequently, to the possibility of being redeployed for purposes that extend beyond aesthetic experience. Oliver Davis, one of the most attentive interpreters of Rancière's thought, remarks:

> The aesthetic affect more often operates below the threshold of awareness, subliminally or unconsciously and it is by way of this direct and repeated encounter with aesthetic contingency that the spectator is not only "emancipated" in the modest sense of being freed to interpret the artwork in question but, by the same token, is emancipated by the experience of aesthetic art, formed for "emancipation" in the properly political sense, by being disposed to recognize contingency in other human artifacts that are not artworks in the strict sense. (Davis 2013: 162)

[29] The "aesthetic regime," as this notion is developed in Rancière's work on political aesthetics, is a post-ethical and post-representational order of artistic practice and experience wherein hierarchies of art genres and forms, as well as the distinctions in their presupposed audience, are suspended. This is a democratic system wherein aesthetic experience posits a sensible relationship between the viewers and the world, regardless of their education or social background. Here, artworks do not reference specific symbolic functions, stable meanings, and knowledge in order to be decoded: sensibility is no longer subsumed to intelligibility as an epistemic condition of the artwork's consumption, and materialities and significations are mixed. The viewers are, thus, free to experience the artwork and to reconfigure it as they please since there are no longer pre-given structures defining what can be said or represented, in what manner and by whom. This kind of democratic aesthetic experience prompts a liberation of the perceptual field for everyone to emerge as equal in the sociopolitical order. For a thorough unpacking of this concept, see Tanke (2011).

Elaborating on Rancière's notion of aesthetic affect, Davis is saying that artworks in the aesthetic regime are inevitably political since they compel us to renegotiate them, in their perceptual open-endedness, for other purposes: aesthetic affect enables a renewed way of looking, namely a disposition, toward the world. Phrased differently, the political extension of aesthetic experience consists of an affective reorientation of the subject toward the objects of the world. From this vantage, aesthetic affect is political because it is formative and instructive of different modes of looking at the world. More precisely, photographs and films can "rework the frame of our perceptions and the dynamism of our affects" and, in so doing, they point us in the direction of new forms of political subjectivization (Rancière 2011: 82). Aesthetic experience, for Rancière, leads to political subjectivization when it produces sensible connections and disconnections that rewire the relation between bodies and the world: such new relational modalities may cause a break "in the fabric of common experience that change[s] the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible" (2011: 72), thereby creating new possibilities of collective political expression.

I would argue that it is through a *partage* of (aesthetic) affect that "affect worlds" can be formed. "Affect worlds" are defined by Lauren Berlant as "worlds organized by the unsaids whose open secret pulsations allow tender gesture, glances, and what all else goes without saying to suffuse and destabilize the ordinary, to make new social arrangements, even when it's not being really revolutionary" (Berlant and Greenwald 2012: 87). They are concomitantly constituted by cultural forms and their publics, and they envelop readers or viewers in collective embodied atmospheres in which certain senses of the world are shared and circulate. Often, individuals are bound in an affective relation of this kind through the common sharing of fantasies that are activated by aesthetic work. With this in mind, cultural registers should be attended to by way of considering the affective economies of investments in which we are immersed and that often result from the forces exerted by social and political infrastructures. This interplay of the affective, the aesthetic and the political recalls the orchestration of the sensible texture of the common life described by Rancière.

Artworks can be seen both as an aesthetic repertoire of affects that are shared within, or at the margins of, the public sphere, and as an indicator of the genres of sociality that are in place in contemporary culture and that organize our lives. In other words, literary texts, films, and photographs provide an opportunity to examine how aesthetic genres both reflect and shape what Berlant calls "intimate publics": by sparking desires and fantasies in

readers/viewers, genres operate in the formation of aesthetic and affective subjects who establish, or feel they are part of, communities.[30] This draws attention to the idea that in addition to being constituted as the outcome of their socio-cultural embeddedness, affective arrangements are also informed by collective aesthetic fantasies. Thus, affect worlds may become, in turn, platforms for circulating and disseminating narrative fantasies that potentially counteract the current distribution of the sensible. In this sense, attending critically to the "affective registers of aesthetics" (Berlant 2015a: 280) is part of the queer theoretical project of destabilizing normative fantasies in order to let emerge new possibilities for inhabiting the world queerly.

Different from Berlant, who is peculiarly attentive to the minor, the vernacular, the non-dramatic and non-revolutionary, namely, the least "intense" aesthetic forms, Rancière embraces primarily those aesthetic practices that show a propensity to express, to use his terminology, "dissensual" political worldviews. It could be argued that in scavenging grand possibilities in the "major" art genres, Rancière may be precluded from the possibility of finding actually disruptive potentialities within the affect worlds inhabited by those "wronged" subjects that he wants to reinstate in the sociopolitical ambit: queer studies could fruitfully intervene here to illuminate the multiplicity of archives that might be unearthed and that might possibly unite publics under a shared anti-normative ethos. I will show how fashion photography exemplifies a queer archive of this sort from which multiple political gestures, in the Rancièrean sense, can be excavated in order to compose queer affect worlds; in this section of the chapter, however, I am interested in how Rancière offers us a framework for thinking about the relationship between the aesthetic and the political through the affective tool of the "sensible." In the attempt to undermine the normalizing partition of the sensible, Rancière imagines a community that is first and foremost dissensual.

Similar to Nancy's singular plurality, Rancière posits separation as the presupposition of what he calls aesthetic community. An aesthetic community is not an idealized community of taste but a community tied by "disagreement," composed of individuals who are together in the framing of a shared sensorium and yet apart in their respective singularities. It is thanks to this unity in disconnection that a new aesthetic configuration of collective experience might be possible. Aesthetic experience, by involving the viewers in a spatio-temporal

[30] Berlant defines a genre as "an aesthetic structure of affective expectation" (2008a: 4).

segment that detaches them from their ordinary lives, alters their habituated modes of going through life and fitting in: in this sense, by disconnecting them from the logic of cause-effect which regulates their actions, a new contact with the world as well as with other people can be established through aesthetic experience. Rancière explains aesthetic experience in terms of:

> a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world where they live and the way in which they are equipped for "fitting" it. It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible. As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation. (2008: 11)

Thus, to paraphrase him, aesthetic experience can have political outcomes with the proviso that it causes a shift from a given sensory world to another: a shift toward a new aesthetic fabric, or sensorium, warrants new and unpredictable in/capacities, non/relations (between what is felt and what is thought), forms of in/tolerance, and un/belonging, in other words "the production of a new being-together" (2008: 12). This rupture with the sensory fabric of the dominant order defines aesthetic experience in terms of "ambivalence," for the aesthetic gesture can intervene in the system of given forms and genres and unsettle its foundation through the proposition of new sensible forms of life. The aesthetic gesture operates within a given sensorium in order to yield a new form of convivial feeling and thinking among equals (Dasgupta 2008: 73). Photography, alongside film and video art, is addressed epistemologically by Rancière as a conduit for a dynamic reframing of affect which potentially engenders novel forms of political subjectivity.

Following a line of thinking that foregrounds the political capacity of artworks in the formation of new subjectivities as well as new worldviews, literary theorists Christopher Castiglia and Russ Castronovo argue that in addition to being about self-transformation, "aesthetics contain the possibility of articulating differences, not in a namby-pamby mode of liberal retreat but in a manner that radically reconfigures reconciliation so that it can no longer secure stability or an identity that rests on oneness" (2004: 426-427). They propose "a study of aesthetics which traffics in affective sensations that promise—without necessarily providing—post-identity or non-normative forms of collectivism" through sensations and the play of the imagination (428), that is, a study that is imaginative and generative of non-

hegemonic collective identifications. Along this trajectory, affect is a crucial component as it bridges the distance between us, as spectators and possible members of "counterpublics," and the aesthetic object: emotional experience is what imaginatively and queerly unites us.[31]

This kind of aesthetic-affective approach is ultimately aimed at imagining forms of post-identitarian collectivism. I would add that by postulating the aesthetic as a possible queer overture to collectivized forms of solidarity one can surpass the trappings of psychoanalytic analyses of gay and lesbian spectatorship, which limit the aesthetic experience to a process of self-formation, and attend instead to the plurality of experience, thereby figuring modes of collective relationality. This way, queerness emerges forcefully in terms of an affective relatedness to the world, pointing in the direction of an imaginative collective (dis- or re-) orientation via the mobilization of desires and fantasies. In this light, queerness can be understood as unfolding through aesthetic relationality and as alluding to futural horizons of experience.

1.4 Disidentification and Queer World-making

I mentioned earlier that, according to Rancière, the dissensual character of the aesthetic resides in its political nod toward the disruption of a certain distribution of the sensible and its consequent reassessment, which may also allow for the emergence of a new political people. In the aesthetic community, dissensus is enacted through a move that Rancière calls

[31] Cultural theorist Dana Seitler, by queering Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790), whose principle of *sensus communis* widely informs both Nancy's and Rancière's theories of community, has built a theoretical framework for an understanding of the aesthetic as a collective sensual activity that defies normative rationality and produces knowledge by way of feeling. Seitler is committed to thinking about queer aesthetics as independent from the constraints of identity politics (for instance, defining an aesthetic as queer simply because it directly references queer subjects or because these subjects employ it) and to conceiving of queerness as being produced through aesthetic forms. By attending to the methods through which queerness is expressed we can understand "how a queer aesthetic functions at various intersections of sensory experience, imagined collectivity, and the material world" (2014: 53). Through an affective engagement with the aesthetic, the viewer is virtually connected to other viewers. Precisely, the link between the individual and the community is furnished, according to Seitler, by what Kant refers to as the "universal communicability" produced in subjects by the aesthetic object. Through a conveyance of "sensual enjoyment," the aesthetic constitutes us as a "community of feeling subjects." The Kantian idea that the aesthetic is a space wherein individuals can experience their openness to a freedom that unites them in a community of taste based on individual consent reveals a construal of art as a non-autonomous sphere in which queer social collective formations are made possible.

"disidentification" (*désidentification*) (2008: 11).[32] Disidentification is, on the one hand, an "aesthetic effect," namely the manifestation of a disjuncture or break from the normative modes of thought and relations that sustain the partition of the sensible (and it also reflects a constitutive separation, or "disconnection," in which the aesthetic community is grounded). On the other hand, disidentification is the process that warrants political subjectivization. As Rancière states, "[E]very form of subjectivization is a form of disidentification" (1992: 61; Dasgupta and Rancière 2008: 75). It is by disidentifying with, to employ queer theory terminology, "regimes of the normal" (Warner 1993: xxvii) that art reinscribes in the sensible social field the subjects erased by the police's order and affirms dissensual difference as the very egalitarian principle of the life in common. Thus, the disidentification that aesthetic experience engenders is aimed at defusing the mechanisms of identitarian categorization on which society relies in order to determine which constituency to legitimate and recognize and which not.

Art historian Roger Cook (2009) notes that the Rancièrean disidentification is intrinsically queer because it is a gesture of "unbecoming" that rejects the call for identitarian identification required in the policing of the social order. "Queer," as employed in this thesis, is about affective disorientation and transitivity, instead of classification and substantiality: it ungrounds subjectivity and approaches collectivity through a vast array of minor affective registers and modes of sociality. Rancière himself, in a passage that aligns him with a queer engagement with ethics and politics, asserts that "political being-together is a being-between: between identities, between worlds [...] between several names, several identities" (1999: 137-138). Democratic politics, in Rancièrean terms, implies the subject's forsaking, in a movement of "declassification," of the marginalized identity one has been allotted in favor of a different, in-between, transitive, ambivalent, no or any, position (May 2008: 49-50). Radical equality, we can infer, is contingent upon the manifestation of one's refusal to abide by the instrumentalization of the rhetoric of identity that allocates "shares" in the sociopolitical order.

[32] This term is used by Judith Butler to describe the psychoanalytic phenomenon of a "disavowed identification": an identification that has been unconsciously made and denied. In her words, disidentification is "an identification that one fears to make only because one has already made it" (Butler 1993: 112). Slavoj Žižek (1991) construes disidentification as a collapse of political possibility, a "fictionalization" that immobilizes the political. Rancière, instead, considers disidentification as the primary effect of the aesthetic gesture (1992: 61; 1999).

By speaking of queerness in the context of the aesthetic politics of the photographic image, I want to foreground the capacity of aesthetic (re-)presentations to cut across axes of difference and shape imaginative relations without necessarily addressing queer publics but that, however, presuppose an urge for transformative ethical views on the matter of social, political, and emotional life. In other words, queer aesthetic practices are those practices that can unite different individuals through their differences as well as their shared frictions with dominant cultures. By this token, individuals can come to form queer counterpublics, which are constituted through the circulation of texts and images and rely on relations among strangers who recognize that participating in dissensual aesthetic experiences entails exposure to different ways of being oriented to the world. In the next chapter I will tie counterpublics to my research archive.

Disidentification acquires particular resonance within queer aesthetics. The concept is in fact employed by José Muñoz for queer ethico-political purposes. According to Muñoz, who elaborates on Sedgwick's insights on identification, to identify with objects, histories, people, and orientations, implies counter-identifying, as well as only partially identifying, with various social and psychic aspects of the world. Based on the premise that subjects are formed through multiple sites of identification, disidentification operates as a queer cultural, political, and ethical strategy for questioning and destabilizing the norms and ideologies enmeshed in mainstream culture. Thus, disidentification is a medium through which minority subjects can detach themselves from the exclusionary protocols that organize the public sphere, in which the fictive idea of unitary identity is advocated. For Muñoz, deeply inspired by Sedgwick's work on affect, in particular her reflection on the transformative potential of shame, disidentification works by transfiguring or resignifying a cultural form that was not coded originally to resonate with the disidentifying subject. By immersing themselves in this cultural form, namely, within its structure and ideology, the disidentifying subjects can rework it from the inside. Disidentification effects its resistance against ideological assimilation by melancholically interacting with it. It is a performative hermeneutic of decoding and reformulating dominant cultural forms that is carried out by minority subjects through anti-normative aesthetic actions. Disidentification is for Muñoz not about abandoning or surpassing self-identification or any socio-cultural identity components so much as it is about problematizing these by way of envisioning forms of affective and aesthetic collective identification as well as new worldviews.

In *Disidentifications* (1999) and *Cruising Utopia* (2009), in which he develops a utopian theory of queerness as a "horizon" or "potentiality," Muñoz presents the aesthetic as the vehicle through which queerness as "sense" can also become a praxis. Although his urge for a collective disidentification from the normative structuring of social and emotional life aligns him to Rancière, he does not set the goals of the artistic gesture in terms of the socio-political formation that it could help enact (for Rancière, as we have seen, the objective is an egalitarian, democratic arrangement). For Muñoz, queerness remains a potentiality that is immanent in the world and yet is not disclosed: it is "an ideality or a figuration of a mode of being in the world that is not yet here" (2013a: 103). As philosopher Michael O'Rourke explains, Muñoz views queerness as a utopian ideality that cannot be attained in the here and now and whose "not-yet-hereness represents perverse temporalities in which *glimpses* of other possibilities and potentialities appear fleetingly" (O'Rourke 2014: 34). Queerness, in its potentiality, is something that is insistently *sensed* and, in this sense, it is a synonym of "feeling" (O'Rourke: 11). This could be rephrased by saying that the sense of queerness is its very insistence on the possibility of being collectively sensed or felt. Moreover, propelling this idea forward, if queerness is about the collective feeling of a shared sense of the world, then a queer aesthetics might be about the possibility of disseminating this feeling, or affect, through artworks into the socio-political sphere.

Queerness as praxis figures in Muñoz's work as a collective doing, a performative work toward the enactment of possibilities of another world, a critical practice that pursues the invention of new worlds. It is a potentiality that is eminent as an affective mode of non-being and needs to be materialized. The role of a queer aesthetics is, then, to map out social relations and worldviews and act as a conveyor for their affective transmission to the publics. Seen from this angle, the aesthetic gesture is *in potentia* queer and performative, insofar as it can participate in a structural reassessment of the public sphere. Its purpose is to actualize collective utopias by designing new worlds (namely, the act of queer world-making) that are unconstrained by heteronormativity. For example, according to Muñoz, by presenting body types and attitudes that collide with the standards of mainstream representations (heteronormative and homonormative), queer aesthetic performances could dislodge desire from the dominant imprints that organize mainstream erotic imagination and could gesture toward the experience of new forms of collectivity. In this sense, queer performances could be said to disclose their world-making potential by way of disidentification (Muñoz 1999).

For both Muñoz and Rancière disidentification is an aesthetic performative mode that undermines and transforms a cultural logic (or ideology) from the inside through a repartition of the sensible that unhinges the sovereign order. Although Rancière does not provide specific examples of disidentification, one can safely assume that as a strategy for political subjectivization, it is aimed, on a par with Muñoz's use of the same concept, at a restructuring of society: by operating on the sensible, which political, social, and symbolic ordering rely on in different ways, disidentification is an aesthetic act of resistance, or dissensus, that envisages a post-identitarian collective co-existence of, borrowing an expression from Giorgio Agamben, "whatever singularities" (1990) may be at odds with the "normal." More specifically, as a queer practice, disidentification sets out to enact queer world-making, definable as the formation of new worldly possibilities that hinge on a queer sense of the world.[33] "Queer sense of the world," an expression which will recur throughout the dissertation, is the Nancean phrasing through which Muñoz refers to the registration of "affective particularity, relational sensuousness, and the intricacies of belonging" that can be performatively opened up by visual images, irrespective of any explicit or legible queer pronouncement (2007: 550).

Lauren Berlant shares with Muñoz the interpretation of the aesthetic as potentially revelatory of better ways of living the present for queer people. However, whereas Muñoz is critically invested in thinking about art forms in terms of performative gestures of utopian longings, Berlant sees them as affective practices that conflict with the cruelty of the present which most minority subjects need to face. Whether under the sign of figurative futurity (Muñoz), i.e. the then and there, or in the vein of "depressive realism" (Berlant 2007b), i.e. the here and now, according to both theorists aesthetic performances have the capacity to establish a sense of belonging that is not shrunk by the oppressive genres of the "good life". Thus, different aesthetic and affective registers ought to be sorted across various art forms as means for assessing the present and imagining its transformation. Such a practice, by pursuing a reconfiguration of the present, seeks to unearth "the affective resources for

[33] Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, among other queer theorists, have proposed the idea that the aesthetic moment can generate collective transformations that become instances of queer world-making (Berlant and Warner 1998: 558).

otherwiseness that exists both in the realms of the aesthetic and the quotidian" (Muñoz 2013b).[34]

I argue that Rancière's reflection on the "emplotment" (2002) of art and life correlates with queer theory's praxis of world-making, for they both aim to reorganize accepted versions of reality and create new collective experiences. As I stressed earlier, the aesthetic gesture of the photographic image can function as a means to reassemble the social order by way of giving voice to those who are excluded from the perceptual field and by forging new relations across subjects and communities. Based on this premise, it might be possible to think of an aesthetic community as a possible effect of the "democratic affectivity" of art, namely, its egalitarian operationality across the collective sensorium. In this chapter I have traced the outlines of a queer aesthetic theory of the image rooted in two main ideas: based on Nancy's reflection, the photographic image is a site for the encounter of different singularities that become virtually interlinked in a common perceptual texture; in the aesthetic experience (wherein we are together and yet we do not relinquish our individuality), which is primarily an affective engagement with otherness, we can grasp and then circulate a different sense of the world. Moreover, following Rancière (who disagrees with Nancy that the sense of community is ontologically given and argues instead that this must be attained through an aesthetico-political resistance against the policing categorization and structural division effected by the dominant culture), not only does art produce an aesthetic affect that binds us together, but more importantly it can solicit political intervention in the direction of a democratic configuration of common experience. What Nancy and Rancière share with each other and with queer theory, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, is a concern with the ways in which art practices can envision post-identitarian forms of collectivity, which are ensconced in the formulas "sense-making" and "world-making," as well as the belief in the crucial role that affect plays in thinking and designing such collective formations.

This dissertation sets out to investigate how fashion images can mobilize modes of feeling that ground the formation of queer affect worlds: "queer" here does not refer to the

[34] The concept of "otherwiseness," which recurs more or less explicitly throughout the work of both Berlant and Muñoz, is derived from Adorno's idea of an ethical aesthetic that can suggest the "otherwise." As part of his materialist analysis of aesthetics, Adorno writes: "Even in the most sublimated work of art there is a hidden 'it should be otherwise.' When a work is merely itself and no other thing, as in a pure pseudo-scientific construction, it becomes bad art – literally pre-artistic. [...] As eminently constructed and produced objects, works of art [...] point to a practice from which they abstain: the creation of a just life" (2007 [1962]: 194)

LGBTQ sexual identity of the image makers or the viewers, but rather indicates the collectively shared feeling of disorientation from those protocols that prescribe the legibility and desirability of certain ways of being in the world. As the next chapters will show, fashion photo stories are montages of affective scenes that can activate a disorienting, dissensual, disidentifying relation with aestheticized fantasies of the good life. Thus far, in this chapter, I have built a framework for understanding the world-making potential of photographic images: extrapolating from Nancy I have argued that, on the one hand, images can expose different singularities to the possibility of feeling collectively tuned in to the disclosure of new senses of the world; subsequently, putting Nancy in dialogue with Rancière, I have brought into focus the political implication of this disclosure of sense: images can in fact be considered aesthetic gestures that, in addition to revealing world possibilities, may allow for a dissensual spectatorial experience of disidentification with the normative aesthetic scripts that organize the reproduction of the world as it is, and be conducive to a reassessment of the sensible that weaves the social fabric. Based on these considerations, I will now move to a reflection on the specificity of the fashion image and I will discuss how fashion photography facilitates an egalitarian affective encounter that might endow the viewer with a renewed perspective on the world, in opposition to the trite rhetoric of exclusivity and elitism that is commonly employed in order to dismiss the fashion photograph as a mere agent of commercial commodification.

1.5 The Politics of the Fashion Image

In *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005) queer theorist Jack Halberstam argues for the use of queer, often ephemeral, archives such as slam poetry and dancing, to dig up obliterated meanings and practices and form repertoires for queer counterpublics. Ann Cvetkovich (2003) also emphasizes how visual and material culture provide accounts of sensory experience that are of great importance in the formation of queer repositories of feelings which are not normally diffused and advocated within mainstream culture. In the wake of these writings, I propose that fashion photography is an unacknowledged queer reservoir which collects styles, gestures, and affects that might contribute to shaping new queer senses of the world. My conceptualization of the fashion photographic image is contingent on an understanding

of the aesthetic as a collectivized attempt to unfurl queerness in its ability to debase normative worldviews. I contend that we, as viewers, by engaging our senses could fruitfully use fashion images as a point of departure for broader inquiries into the world in which we, as well as the images, find ourselves. Fashion images, in fact, can offer an understanding of the affective modes of relationality put in place within society as well as envision new ones.

This chapter, thus far, has situated a discussion of the photographic image within a broader inquiry into aesthetics *as* politics. In this section, I will extend my reflection on the political aspect of the photographic image to the fashion image. My interpretation of fashion images seeks to dispute the idea that "fashion-as-politics is only conceivable as a catchy idea for a 'fashion story'" (McRobbie 1998: 153). If, on the one hand, feminist cultural theorists have devoted critical attention, typically with a psychoanalytic approach, to fashion images in view of their capacity to produce visual pleasure in their predominantly female audience (Evans and Thornton 1989; Griggers 1990; Fuss 1991; Bancroft 2012), on the other hand, sociological and anthropological discussions of fashion imagery have been critical of the pretense of radicalism that independent fashion magazines often expressed, particularly in the 1980s (Hebdige 1985). Throughout the dissertation, my reading of fashion photographic narratives attempts to demonstrate how "fashion-as-politics," more than just a "catchy idea," is actually, for alternative fashion magazines, the chief operational strategy for disseminating visual discourses with the purpose of troubling the rhetoric of normative desires and pleasures through which fashion imagery has too often uncritically reflected and reproduced dominant social values.

As the following chapters will explore in closer detail, fashion narratives often propose alternative ways of depicting the life of non-normative subjects and problematize ethical discourses of relationality and community. Fashion photographic images, on the one side, engender an affective engagement between viewers and aesthetic objects that is at the core of the process of imagining alternative futures, and on the other, they operate as mobile sites for multiple and ever-shifting performative enactments of queer desires and subjectivities. This twofold functioning of the fashion image can be better understood through the conceptual tool of "metapolitics." Rancière defines metapolitics as the aesthetic's "way of producing its own politics, proposing to politics rearrangements of its space, reconfiguring art

as a political issue, or asserting itself as true politics" (2002: 137).[35] The aesthetic is metapolitical in the sense that it may interweave art and life so as to produce alternative forms of life: through sensory appearances the aesthetic can propose new socio-political configurations. Fashion scholar Elke Gaugele has argued for an understanding of fashion in terms of aesthetic metapolitics on the grounds that fashion "accomplishes a new sensorium of shared fictions and cultural belongings through a dissemination of media images" (2014a: 13). If, on the one hand, the "aesthetic regime of fashion" routinely uses images to reinforce its power structures, it also "opens and expands spaces for the production of alternative aesthetic politics in the form of countercultural and postcolonial representations of identities, bodies, and styles" (2014b: 166-167).

Fashion photography is a visual aesthetic practice that bears the power to create and reinforce norms by partitioning the sensible through the visual rhetorics of the aspirational life, as well as to shift or resist such norms by reshaping the aesthetic sensorium through images that point to what Berlant calls "a lateral exploration of an elsewhere" (2011: 20). Elsewheres, here, are world-making sites wherein the political can be reimagined. I argue that fashion images can shape "lateral aesthetics," or spaces of "lateral agency" (Berlant 2007a), for they can indicate scenarios that do not replicate the established conditions of existence, for instance by proposing affective scenes that are not dictated by heteronormative "happiness scripts" (Ahmed 2010: 91). Although lateral aesthetics in their engagement with speculative possibilities may not necessarily formulate lasting alternatives, they can nonetheless "call forth different, and at times quite radical, capacities for existence" (Aden and Bateman 2015: 106).[36] Fashion images can unite different individuals through their differences as well as through their shared conflicts with dominant cultures. They can bind subjects by developing imaginings that foster affiliation, in the form of shared affective

[35] Within this context, my application of "metapolitics" suggests the idea that fashion photography has a mediatic function: it produces aesthetic imaginaries that come to imbue popular culture and society at large. As such, it can generate all kinds of meanings, some of which may be problematic (as is the case, for instance, with the so-called "heroin-chic" style of fashion imagery). Thus, I understand metapolitics as a "neutral" concept that acquires different connotations based on the specific meanings it circulates. For a historical and philosophical reconstruction of metapolitics, see Bosteels (2010).

[36] Establishing a link between Berlant and Rancière, Elizabeth Adan and Benjamin Bateman propose that the lateral aesthetics enabled by artistic work can open up the space for "emancipatory politics": this is, in fact, a space where "sensation and perception drift from their otherwise preconceived meanings and effects and emerge unfettered by familiar, canonical, or otherwise dominant suppositions creating instead, as Rancière puts it, 'scenes of dissensus'" (110).

resonances, among readers-viewers. They design fictive, hypothetical scenarios in which queer life configurations are staged. In this respect, the fashion imagination brings other possible worlds into view.

In their envisioning of alternative futures that collide with everyday normative cultural formations, fashion images can participate in the redistribution of the sensible: they can derail aesthetic norms and habits by disseminating narrative fantasies that advance possibilities for inhabiting the world differently. In other terms, fashion photography can urge the viewer to engage with the image as a creative site for longings and attachments to fantasies that counteract those condoned in their everyday lives by the dominant culture. The fashion image does not foster propositional knowledge; rather, it exposes the viewer to alternative embodied attitudes toward the world. In my case studies I will illustrate how fashion spreads published in alternative publications at the turn of the twenty-first century gave expression to subjects who problematized categorizations of legibility and social identity, such as disaffected teenagers (in Chapter 3), "indecent" working-class youth (Chapter 4), and sexually ambivalent children (Chapter 5).

On the set of a photo shoot the models' bodies can be captured in their performance of poses and gestures that provoke a reconsideration of aesthetic and moral boundaries. By exhibiting choreographies of the body that challenge composure and control, fashion pictures may express dissidence against the regulation of who should have a voice and what should be visualized; in this sense, the fashion image contributes to dissembling the order according to which only certain subjects are represented in the visual public sphere. Subjects who are, to use Rancière's words, "wronged" by the system, such as the queer-looking teenagers associated with Satanic sects and crimes in Chapter 3, may become, in the scene of the fashion photograph, carriers of queer feelings and modes of looking at the world. This is made possible by the porous parameters of the fashion photographic narrative (a genre that I will unpack in the next chapter) as well as, to a lesser degree, by the frequent involvement of LGBTQ personnel in the material production of fashion imagery in their capacities as editors, photographers, stylists, and make-up artists.

Social theorist Elspeth Probyn evocatively argues that images "move as lines of desire" in the sense that they carry a socio-cultural imaginary into play that manifests itself in bodies or as virtual material: they can dislodge desire from its attachment to a subject or object and therefore elude normative arrangements of subjects and objects. In so doing, "they can carry

longing: they throw us forward into other relations of becoming and belonging" (1996: 59). According to Probyn, images "traverse" the social: they can suggest forms of relationality and connections that bypass the traps of realist epistemologies and identitarian thinking, hinting at alternative, sensible ways of rethinking one's own orientation to the world and to others. They are the forms through which desire is articulated in the social space. In relation to "lesbian images (or images we wish were lesbian)," she writes:

> The image, thus freed from its post within a structure of law, lack, and signification, can begin to move all over the place: It then causes different ripples and affects, effects of desire and desirous affects. Turning away from the game of matching signifiers to signifieds, we can begin to focus on the movement of images as effecting and affecting movement. […] The image is lesbian only inasmuch as it allows for lesbian lines of connection, the way it engages desire and the way in which desire moves it. […] To be absolutely clear about it, the image is queer not in and of itself, but in relation to other images and bodies—a movement that refuses to be policed at the same time that it says come to me, as it bends the line, causing changed relations of proximity. (1996: 59-60)

According to Probyn, queer desire can spread through images as a social force, as "lines that scramble[s] the subjective, the sexual, the social" (62). This construal of the image as a vector of queer desire disentangles representation from the constraints and expectations of meaning-production and emphasizes the capacity of imagination and desire to instigate unexpected connections (Engel 2011).

I am using Probyn's evocative formulation of the desirous image to highlight how fashion images, imbued as they are with affective desire in their scenography of bodies and clothes, operate as lines of a sensible reorientation of our own desires, fantasies, and identifications, unlocking alternative futurities (the "not-yet-here"). These alternative futurities are activated by "fashion imagination," which can be used as a queering tool. With "queering," following Antke Engel, I refer to a process "which engender[s] anti-identitary politics or queerly affect[s] politics" and, as such, is a "constitutive moment of the political" (2011). Fashion imagination can be defined as aesthetic imagination pivoted on style embodiment: it triggers identifications with bodies, oftentimes virtual, that are styled, or "appear," in ways that resonate with our aesthetic projections, aspirations, or taste. It allows us, for instance, to envision our or others' bodies as fashioned in ways through which we/they can experience a particular relation to the world. It is about both aesthetics and affect. In other words, it is about experiencing the possibility of feeling in a certain way based on how the scene of our body moving in the world is staged in our fantasy. Through fashion

imagination we can perceive ourselves embodying a certain appearance, which is also a style of being in the world, and therefore moving through life steeped in a certain mood. The fashion imagination is, thus, a productive force that invites the possibility of negotiating our subjectivity through styles of self-presentation that convey to us certain feelings.

While many artworks, theoretically, brim with the utopian potential to throw a spanner in the works of policing systems, I propose that fashion photographs might be more capable of doing so than other genres of photography. This is because the fashion image incentivizes the embodied imagining of particular "styles" of being in the world (by confronting us with stylized scenes that purport to solicit a certain vision of that world). Following fashion theorist Rosie Findlay, if we acknowledge that "imaginary and real are interwoven in our simultaneous, embodied perception of the world" insofar as, with Merleau-Ponty, "the imaginary is already woven into the very texture of the perceptual world" and perceptions are "threaded into the material world," then we can grapple with the idea that by imagining and perceiving oneself embodying a certain style or appearance we also embody a certain way of being in the world (2016: 85-86).

In order to convey a certain view of the world, fashion photographs need to have an effect on the body of the viewer: for this reason, they take great pains to rehearse and modulate elements such as clothing, bodily postures, gestures, and settings so that these become affective connectors with the (bodies of the) viewers. The emotive content stemming from the labor that goes into the orchestration of these material mediators magnetizes the viewers. It could be said that it is in light of its intimate concern with "style"—by which I intend the modality of emergence of a range of gestures and looks that compose a certain attitude and that shapes one's surroundings while simultaneously being informed by them—that the fashion image is particularly adept at implicating its viewer in a certain version of life. In other words, I ascribe the political force of the fashion image to its propensity to affectively mobilize aesthetic appearances toward their collective embodiment. The fashion image has to affect the viewer, somatically, by generating a resonance that manifests first at the level of the body below the threshold of signification. But, as media theorist Anna Gibbs writes, because affect and cognition get assembled in consciousness, ideas depend crucially on the embodied aspect of affect (2011); affect, she asserts, "[is] the primary communicational medium for the circulation of ideas, attitudes and prescriptions for action among them"

(2002: 339). Thus, as a consequence of its affective capture, the fashion image can rigidify or alter one's current dispositions.

Fashion imagination is given expression especially through photographic practices that visualize or conjure aesthetic imaginings through bodily arrangements (and it is through such arrangements that style can be expressed as a pictorial statement). It can be deployed through fashion images in order to both enforce or question certain bodily regimes. In this dissertation, I am interested in how the fashion image can produce and circulate forms of difference that eschew classificatory logics and how such forms might "stick," encouraging fashion magazine publics to engage with the matters at issue. By being exposed to new outlooks on worldly matters and developing unexpected allegiances, viewers can acquire new emotional understanding and embodied attitudes. In this sense, fashion images, by activating the viewers' imagination, can be responsible for inspiring new attachments to objects and ultimately projecting their publics into new horizons of being. More pragmatically, by engaging with fashion images—in particular through a mode of slow and attentive reading that facilitates an affective entanglement with the bodies and moods in the image—features of masculinity and femininity coded in relation to the imagery in question, for example, might be operationalized in real life.

In the encounter with the fashion photographic image that this dissertation is concerned with, readers-viewers are exposed to new possibilities of orienting themselves in the world: what, inspired by Nancy, I have referred to as the unfolding of new senses of the world, or, with a queer theory terminology, queer futural horizons of experience. It is my argument that fashion images can act as world-making devices insofar as they can attune us to the mood-world of subjects who respond to and disidentify with both the practice of representation of fashioned bodies proper to the culture of fashion and the real-life social discourses that this culture tends to reenact. They foster imaginings that, as the case studies will show, may provoke viewers to question their own affective and moral positioning in relation to certain bodies, subjectivities, and forms of life.

In this chapter I have sketched a theory of the photographic image by building, through a queer optic, on the philosophies of Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Rancière. I have begun by explaining how, following Nancy, the photographic image can be understood as a site of relationality wherein multiple singularities can come together through their affective encounter, or vibration, with the image, thereby forging a community rooted in the sharing

of sense. I have argued that this conception of community is resonant with a queer utopian understanding of community as the feeling of being in a collective attunement to a sense of the world that does not presuppose a convergence of identitarian identifications. By discussing the capacity of the image to cause disorientation I have laid the groundwork for an understanding of the image as the presentation of alternative ways of being in the world. In fact, as I have unpacked through Rancière, the photographic image is an event that can either shore up or unsettle a current order of the sensible: I have focused in particular on the latter in order to home in on how the image can contribute to reshaping the collective sensorium and elicit a dissenting experience through which subjects who had been previously rendered mute can gain a space in the aesthetic order. Drawing on Muñoz, I have claimed the queerness of this capacity for dissent: it is in fact through strategies like disidentification that aesthetic practices can work as world-making devices, namely, they can point toward alternative modes of collectivity that rely on a queer sense of the world. In the final section of the chapter I have applied this philosophical discussion to the object of study of my research project: the fashion image. I have proposed that this kind of photographic image can activate lateral agency and call forth different capacities for existence. It is my argument that in view of this potentiality, the fashion photographic image can intervene in a queer reorchestration of the sensible.

CHAPTER 2

The Fashion Photo Story

In the previous chapter I have proposed that the fashion photographic image can be seen as a vehicle for the formation of queer world possibilities. Insofar as it can foster disidentifications with dominant aesthetics reliant on a fixed repertoire of gestures and feelings, it exposes the viewers to "otherwiseness." Caught up in the fashion image, readers-viewers can imaginatively come together, in their respective individualities, in a community of "sense" that is extricated from identitarian logics of belonging. This aesthetic experience is driven by affect: it is in the event of the encounter between the image (with its affective potential) and the viewers (with their "affectability") that affective reorientations in the world are enabled. With this framing as a backdrop, the dissertation now brings into focus the fashion story: a genre that, in the context of the independent fashion photography at the turn of the twenty-first century, visualized "lateral aesthetics" as a political response to dominant representations in visual culture. More specifically, this chapter situates the articulation of queer aesthetics in fashion imagery within the context of the production and circulation of alternative fashion magazines that, beginning in the mid-1990s, blurred the confines of "independent" and "mainstream." The purpose of the chapter is to investigate how this photographic genre has historically provided a platform for the enactment of queer visual scenes that undermine the dominant rhetorics of fashion culture and eventually contributed to a reformulation of the fashion image as a space for the construction of queer imaginaries. After outlining the historical precedents of 1990s fashion editorial photography, this chapter proceeds with a discussion of the fashion photo story as an aesthetic genre: this is explored in the context of the cultural attitudes that in the visual culture of fashion in the 1990s counteracted commercial imagery.

2.1 The Fashion Magazine as Archive

The origins of what we call a fashion magazine date back to the early-eighteenth century society magazines, which recorded changes in taste and promoted desirable clothing for their urban and wealthy female readership. The fashion plates in the magazines served the specific purpose of demonstrating how dresses should be worn, advising on the appropriate postures, manners, and social behavior. Design historian Christopher Breward (2003) explains that although the function of the fashion image in recording "the coming mode" has remained relatively stable throughout history, with the advent of photography and the formation of the modern fashion industry fashion magazines became interested in art and "lifestyle" (with celebrated artists and writers regularly contributing to their content), and by capitalizing on design innovations these magazines turned into coveted objects themselves. Fashion photography prompted engagement with fantasies of both self-amelioration and escapism, to the extent that by looking at this fashion discourse the relationship of women with consumer culture and their participation in public life can be historically charted. The history of the "women's magazine" demonstrates how the genre has at times reinforced male dominance by expecting and encouraging women to dress to please men, and has propagated a vision of consumerism as the path to happiness, while also allowing women to negotiate their relationship with clothing, identity and consumption (Breward 1994).

A queer subterranean history of fashion photography has only recently come to the surface through the work of historian Elspeth H. Brown (2019). Beginning in the 1920s, queer networks of photographers, editors, and models took on an invaluable role in shaping the visual culture of fashion. The realization of fashion photographs largely resulted from a trustworthy collaboration of most often gay, but also lesbian and transgender, creatives who, according to Brown, were able, through a meticulous ideation and choreography of photo shoots, to invite a homoerotic gaze and therefore to promote forms of identification between LGBTQ readers-viewers and the models-characters in the pictures. Brown, whose analysis looks at fashion photography until the 1970s, claims that the affective labor co-produced by fashion intermediaries in several instances coincided with a careful composition of queer performative acts that, on the one hand, spoke *of* the sensibilities of the actors involved in such creative affective work, while on the other, had to speak *to* heteronormative consumer audiences whose markets required the containment of non-normative subjectivities. She

suggests that while models' bodies and affects came to produce a form of sexuality that pandered to the scripts typical of consumer capitalism, nevertheless said public sexuality functioned as a site of body politics for those subjects whose gender or sexuality "placed them in a nonnormative, or queer, relation to the modeling industry's reigning norms concerning beauty, whiteness, and heterosexuality" (2019: 274).

Consistently with Brown, other queer scholars have emphasized how the women's magazine could be thought of as a genre that in trafficking in gossip, extravagance, and role-play has always had an affinity with queer taste (Reed 2006) and has therefore lent itself to queer reading and consumption (Fuss 1991; Lewis 1997). More broadly, literature on periodical studies, predominantly focused on the Victorian and modernist periods, has taken pains to demonstrate the polyvocality of the mainstream fashion magazine: as a genre, in fact, the women's magazine had an important role in mediating mass culture femininity and facilitating women's involvement in the formation of public life by way of consolidating their relationship with consumption practices at the peak of industrial modernity (Parkins 2014). Magazines, alongside books, films, and TV shows, contribute, in fact, to instituting what Berlant calls "intimate publics," namely social arrangements that "involve a scene where people feel emotionally attached to people they don't know and maybe wouldn't like or couldn't identify with in any other way" (cited in Gibson 2007).

Notwithstanding the involvement of queer cultural producers in the making of mainstream fashion imagery as well as the fashion magazine's enchantment for queer readers, the fashion magazine has generally failed to directly engage queer publics or to shift its thematic conventions. A regime of visuality of normative, cisgender, white, heterosexual femininity has been historically endorsed by mainstream fashion photography, involved as it is in the manufacturing of aspirational identities for consumerist purposes. Identity, according to Berlant, "is an engine for the reproduction of iconic figures that are supposed to function as realist aspirations" (Berlant, Zarranz, and Ledoux-Beaugrand 2017: 15). With this idea in mind, fashion photography fabricates identities by means of which aspirational fantasies and identifications are disseminated: this "fabrication" is achieved by assembling an inventory of the "body beautiful" that crystallizes in a relatively static apparatus of representation which exerts its force via the reiteration and multiplication of the same concepts. As part and parcel of the fashion industry, the fashion magazine could be understood along the lines of Adorno and Horkheimer's reflection on mass culture (2002 [1947]), as producing countless aesthetic

variations of the same standardized forms which, subordinated as they are to the schema of mechanical reproduction that sustains the commodity system, fulfil the aims of consumerism and does not require any interpretation on the side of consumers. Although I rebuke Adorno and Horkheimer's argument that in the "culture industry" the reader or spectator is debarred from critical thinking and therefore from being able to assert resistance, the idea of the "mechanical reproduction of beauty" (112) suitably encapsulates the workings of the commercial fashion magazine.

Fashion theorists agree that the "hegemonic fashionable ideal," in its cyclical repackaging, has always been embodied, iconically, by "young, slender, conventionally beautiful, able bodied, and, most often, a cisgender woman" (de Perthuis and Findlay 2019: 221) who mediates the commercial relation between the fashion photograph and the audience's consumption of clothing. In the 1980s the publishing of glossy magazines shifted toward a rhetoric of empowerment, self-confidence, self-improvement, and openness to the world, through which women's publications aimed to shape the subjectivities of their readers as agents of change, typically presuming their heterosexuality (McRobbie 1999: 46-47; 2008: 57). The highly stylized hyperfeminine and hypermasculine bodies commodified in the fashion photography and commercial advertising of the decade—which might seem to be disrupting bodily borders and nodding, in their excess, to more-than-human corporealities—remained anchored to a pre-existent, rigid binary understanding of masculinity and femininity. The 1980s was indeed the period in which women's fashionable looks, epitomized by oversized clothing and padded shoulders, were marketed by fashion magazines through narratives of "power dressing" for the highly corporatized work environment of the time, associated as it was with the neoliberal politics of the Reagan and Thatcher era in the United States and Great Britain respectively (Granata 2017).

As a genre, the fashion photography published in glossy publications has remained static (McRobbie 2008: 90) and has reiterated stagings of femininity conjuring psychic landscapes and scenarios that "operate as a self-perpetuating regime, which refutes and disavows the asking of questions which pertain to the critique of masculinity, patriarchy, and the enforcement of norms emanating from the heterosexual matrix" (99). On the other hand, 1980s British independent "style magazines" covering music, fashion, and culture such as *The Face* (1980-2004; 2019-)*, i-D* (1980-), and *Arena* (1986-2009) were concomitantly preparing the ground for new visual narratives on identity and sexuality that would soon, in the mid-

1990s, find creative platforms in more experimental editorial projects. It was not until the 1990s that the entrenched normativity of the fashion magazine came to be somewhat destabilized and the function of the fashion magazine itself was called into question. In the mid-1990s, as this dissertation will explore, the emergence of alternative fashion publishing offset the fashion magazine's discursive safeguarding of heterosexual and middle-class values, and more ductile understandings of sexuality, affectivity, and sociality began to inform the fashion imaginary.

While ferreting out queer subtexts of modernist women's magazines, as the aforementioned authors endeavored to do, might cast retrospective light on queer consumption patterns of fashion magazines and the queer susceptibility to the moods of early twentieth-century fashion discourse, it is glaringly apparent that the presumed queerness that underpinned fashion's glamorous imaginary has been, historically, heavily camouflaged for the straight majority consumption, and fashion photography has ended up reproducing a relatively monolithic imaginary with which minority subjects had a somewhat secretive and conflicted relationship. If the mainstream fashion magazine promotes change as the very eidos of fashion (with the constant mutability of styles and their cyclical resurfacing from the past), it also fixes the masculine and the feminine within consolidated patterns of taste and experience. With respect to the mainstream magazine, my dissertation looks at the moment in which independent fashion publications intervened in the visual production of the fashion imaginary to respond to what they perceived as the aesthetic normativity of fashion culture, albeit not always succeeding in breaking free from its prevailing conventions.

The archive of independent fashion magazines produced in the late 1990s and early 2000s examined in the dissertation reveals a form of cultural production that stretches and even redefines the boundaries of what could be shown and communicated through a fashion story, thereby provoking a break in the historical regime of fashion imagery. Not only did new subjects (such as disaffected teenagers, working-class youths, and sexually ambiguous children) come into view in the visual field of fashion of the time, but also the affective states in which these photographic subjects were captured enticed inquisitive observation. This alternative kind of fashion photography challenged the iconography of fashion imagery by producing scenes that in their complexity, indeterminacy, and even illegibility, suggested different modes of inhabiting the world.

2.2 Fashion Editorial Photography: A Genre

The 1990s are considered a decade of previously unknown creativity in fashion photography, largely due to the proliferation and success of independent publications and a wave of emerging experimental photographers who challenged preconceived notions of beauty, disarranged habitual representations of masculinity and femininity, and commented on social and political issues traditionally considered beyond the domain of fashion. Overall, they reformulated fashion photography as a situated practice, profoundly embedded in the culture and politics of the time, that circumvented the depiction of clothing for commercial purposes. Fashion photographs, in fact,

> no longer function solely to dictate hemlines and silhouettes, but also to acknowledge their position as vehicles for an expression of cultural attitudes. [...] These fashionable fictions are no longer confined to the commercial codes of the magazine but, rather, have social, psychological and cultural implications beyond the hermetic world of fashion. (Kismaric and Respini 2004: 31)

Whereas this is certainly true, it should be acknowledged that the 1960s was the era in which fashion photography truly gathered momentum, hence laying the groundwork for the style magazines of the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1960s, fashion and documentary photography were blended in fashion magazines such as the British *Nova* (1965-1975), in particular through the collaborative work of photographers Helmut Newton, Harri Peccinotti, and Hans Feurer with Caroline Baker, a fashion editor known for styling female models in men's clothes and using thrift store clothes (Williams 1998: 103).

Photography curators Susan Kismaric and Eva Respini argue that in the 1990s "fashion photography was presenting itself as bypassing fashion photography" due to the employment in its practice of two key narrative modes that allowed fashion photography to acquire a patina of realism which obfuscated its glamorous façade: these were cinema and the snapshot (2004: 30-39). They provided fashion photography with strategies to create narratives, displacing clothing from being the central object of the photograph to being incidental to the storyline: the clothing was no longer advertised as a commodity to be sold to the readers but rather as an instrument partaking in a complex narrative to which it contributed by conferring a sense of "realness." As fashion writer Hanka van der Voet explains:

> Fashion photography was rejuvenating itself at a rapid tempo—from meticulously stylised female nudity and exotic locations as backdrops in the 1980s to a more autonomous approach that manifested itself in the use of snapshot techniques and the creation of a comprehensive narrative in the 1990s—with a fresh, new visual language as a result. This idiom was spoken by a younger generation of photographers and stylists, who believed that fashion photography must possess originality and must tell a story (personal ones included). (Van der Voet 2015: 42)

Cinematic devices such as the use of camera angles and lighting normally used by filmmakers contributed to a heightening of the affective atmosphere of the fashion images (in order to amplify the emotional impact of the narrative on the viewer) and to extending the aesthetic experience of fashion photographs beyond the appreciation of beauty. Kismaric and Respini write, "As fashion photographers changed the models from objects into active humans in realistic situations, they began to make the viewer an extension of these situations. Everything—model, clothing, background, lighting, situations, image and viewer—participated in a narrative fantasy" (2008: 32).

The fashion photographs produced in non-mainstream magazines in the 1990s were about "everything but clothes" (Teunissen 2015), for instead of displaying beautiful clothing in exotic locations or sophisticated interiors, they privileged staged drama and narrative, with clothing contributing to the shaping of the story. Alternative fashion magazines, somewhat counterintuitively, embarked on the project of disbanding the commodity from the framework of fashion in order to give new form and meaning to the fashion image itself within a new independent package. As others have put it, "Clothing was no longer a fixed object of beauty in a fashion story, but an attractive aspect of a narrative that was first and foremost about how we currently live" (Kismaric and Respini 2004: 331). At times, in the photo stories published in the alternative fashion press there was no clothing whatsoever: *Dutch* is one crucial example of a publication that relied on clothing, or its lack thereof, primarily as a narrative tool. In an interview with photography critic Vince Aletti, former *Dutch* editor-in-chief Matthias Vriens said that the nudity of the models in the magazine's photo stories was often the result of material conditions: although *Dutch* was published in Amsterdam, its editorial office was based in Paris, where it faced daunting competition from more established magazines when they had to secure the clothing for the photo shoots.

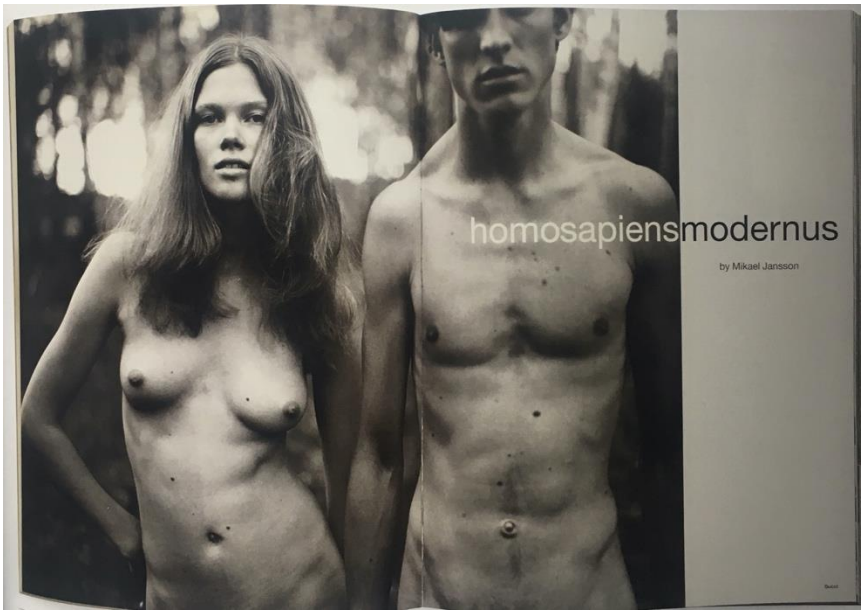


Figure 2. “Homosapiensmodernus,” ph. Mikael Jansson, *Dutch* #18, 1998.

In 1998, as Vriens was approaching *Dutch*'s print deadline with no clothing or money, he “needed to come up with a solution that would blow everybody out of the water, with just about nothing”; finally, “he went with nothing and produced one of the most radical and memorable issues ever: a fashion magazine with no fashion” (Aletti 2019: 280). The cover story of said issue (figure 2) was shot by Swedish photographer Mikael Jansson in Stockholm's archipelago islands: comprised of eighty-two pages of full nudity in nature, the story alluded, as Vriens stated in an introductory note to the photo spread, to the fantasy of “freedom from censure, from fashion and from fear.” While the names of fashion labels, specifically those with large investments in editorial advertising (to name a few: Chloé, Helmut Lang, Lanvin, Louis Vuitton, Paul Smith, and Prada) were referenced at the bottom-right of every page, where fashion credits normally appear, their clothes were nowhere to be seen. Satire and “deadpan wit,” as Aletti writes, characterized this issue: “readers saw the issue as a daring, if cleverly qualified, declaration of independence: a romp, a relief, and an instant classic” (2019: 280). The prevalence given to nudity and the relative presence of clothing in *Dutch* is also typified by the photo spread “Fuzz Box” (fig. 3), shot and styled by Vriens for issue #23 in 1999: in the intimate snapshots that compose this photographic narrative there is no clothing except for a few pairs of see-through women's underwear on male models.

Figure 3. “Fuzz box,” ph. Matthias Vriens, *Dutch* #23, 1999.

The snapshot aesthetic found fertile ground in 1990s fashion photography as it introduced a sense of reality into magazine pages, fostering a degree of empathy in the viewer (Kismaric and Respini 2008: 38). It originally gained currency in art photography circles in the mid-1960s when street photographers like Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander in New York created, with handheld cameras, images that looked accidental (Fineman 2004). This photographic style could be seen as antithetical to the highly staged glamour of commercial fashion photography. However, it slowly percolated into more mainstream fashion publications and became popular in the 1970s due to such factors as the opportunity it offered to experiment with more realistic depictions of clothed bodies and the widespread fascination with the polaroid. In *Dutch*, snapshot stories are featured in abundance because photographs taken with small, light, automatic cameras conveyed a sense of authenticity, spontaneity, and intimacy with which the magazine sought to counteract the artificially glamorous images from the previous decade that were still dominant in mainstream titles. The point-and-shoot cameras used to take fashion snapshots were also easier to carry, and therefore heavy and costly equipment was no longer required to shoot photographic stories. As will be discussed in the next chapter, alongside “documentary” stories, riveting cinematic narratives can also be found in *Dutch*: this corroborates Kismaric and Respini's argument that 1990s independent fashion photography embraced both the snapshot and cinematic techniques, which, in the case of *Dutch*, were freely juxtaposed in the same magazine issues.

Figure 4. Polaroid, ad campaign for Charles Jourdan, ph. Guy Bourdin, Spring 1978.

In 1978 Guy Bourdin shot a picture of a female hand holding a polaroid that depicted a woman (Nicole Meyer) walking sensually down the street (fig. 4). In Bourdin's photograph, which symbolically sanctions the early fascination of fashion photographers with the snapshot aesthetic, the polaroid in the foreground is covering the body of a woman (probably the same woman in the polaroid) whose ankles and feet in fashionable stilettos are the only visible parts. Through the snapshot Bourdin was experimenting with temporality, playing with the viewer's imagination by interleaving different layers of temporal events (according to the temporal logic of production of this image, the polaroid must have been the first to be shot; however, the polaroid is visually interposed between two layers of the same image, one occupied by the hand and the other by the woman's ankles). In the same years, New York-based photographers Arthur Elgort and Patrick Demarchelier embraced the snapshot aesthetic, without the erotic connotations we find in Bourdin's shots, to commercialize the spontaneity and athleticism of young American women.[37] After the Second World War, in fact, editorial fashion photography by moving from the studio set to the street superseded its historical function of illustrating fashion, and progressively inaugurated a trend of

[37] This interest in the joyful female body in movement shot outdoors can be traced back to Martin Munkacsi's post-war photos.

“photojournalist mannerism,” or “pseudo-realism,” in which the fashion photograph is conceived as a fictionalized narrative (Owen 1991: 208-210).

In the style publications of the 1980s, photographs showing moments of the lives of a bohemian niche of artists, musicians, and other creatives of which the magazine producers were part, became popular: those snaps, or stills, offered a glimpse into the life of the photographed subjects, replicating the instantaneous function of the polaroids. This trend of capturing groups of friends in the creative industry, including the magazines' editors, at parties or other social gatherings to offer the reader a look into their hip lifestyle became increasingly popular in 1990s fashion photography: “intentional snapshots” of this kind “are usually characterised by off-lighting, poor focus, blurred images, awkward poses, harsh shadows, or other deviations from formal photographic practice” (Schroeder 2012). The profusion of snapshots or snapshot-inspired images in fashion magazines might also have been, in part, a result of the influence of Nan Goldin's and Larry Clark's photographic work, which introduced a style of “trashy realism” into fashion photography. Their pictures functioned as social documents of the underworld, pushing photography to blur the boundaries of documentary, art, and fashion. Via this route, realism became a trend in fashion photography and many of its tropes are still evident in contemporary fashion imagery.

Figure 5. Kate Moss, ph. Mario Sorrenti, *Calvin Klein Obsession* ad campaign, 1993.

Figures 6-7. Snapshots of Kate Moss, ph. Juergen Teller, 1998.

Mario Sorrenti's and Juergen Teller's snapshots of Kate Moss from the 1990s can be considered examples of staged realism. Perhaps because Sorrenti was Moss's romantic partner at the time, his photos of her, such as those for the *Calvin Klein Obsessed* advertising campaign in 1993 (fig. 5), look intimate, personal, and un-staged. Teller's shots (figs. 6-7), instead, play humorously with the idea of spontaneity. Teller's pictures of Moss form an ongoing series overlapping the private and the commercial: a feature that is emblematic of Teller's style. In many of these photos the candidness and naivety of Moss is exaggerated to the point that the viewers might suspect that the photographer is mocking their inability to discern truth from fiction. Teller's snapshots could also be read as a critique of fashion's pretense of authenticity, specifically in the artificial realness of fashion photographs. These examples evince how realism has been employed by fashion photographers, consciously or not, as a trope that counteracted idealized representations, of women in particular, in fashion photography as well as in popular culture at large. Although such realism was fabricated to more or less the same degree of glamour, its own fictiveness turned into a stratagem for challenging aesthetic norms in mainstream fashion and had an impact in advocating an aesthetic interest in life's more prosaic and banal aspects.

Since the 1990s, the snapshot aesthetic has also been appropriated by fashion brands as an instrument for communicating ideas of authenticity beyond the artificiality of corporate communication. Terry Richardson, who adopted the snapshot for both editorials and brand campaigns, is credited with the popularization of this style. Since the 1990s a plethora of fashion houses have embraced the snapshot for their advertising campaigns as a way of creating a connection with the consumer by means of what cultural geographer Nigel Thrift refers to as "calculated sincerity" (2008: 9). This strategy would make the viewers feel part of the scenes portrayed in the pictures and eventually lure them to consume their products. Social psychologist Jonathan Schroeder explains that the snapshot aesthetic, by penetrating fashion photography, film, fine art, and advertising "embodies the experience economy by showing consumers in the midst of seemingly real, sometimes exciting, but often mundane experiences. [...] The *staged spontaneity* of the snapshot offers a powerful and flexible stylistic tool that forms the basis of the image economy" (2012: 130, original emphasis).

Similar to the genealogy of the snapshot, the influence of cinema on fashion photography also originated much earlier: it can be observed in the editorials shot in the 1970s by Gian Paolo Barbieri, Guy Bourdin, Sarah Moon, Helmut Newton, and Deborah Turbeville (with precedents in post-war photo-journalistic fashion pictures). Newton, whose pictures from the 1960s "were more concerned with drama than the erotic" (Harrison 1985: 51), ought to be credited for having brought a high cinematic quality to fashion photography. Even earlier, beginning in the late 1950s, Newton had photographed female models next to symbols of modernity such as airplanes (as in a photo story for *British Vogue* in 1967) or cabs (as in the pictures for *Vogue Australia* in 1959) and looking seemingly unaware of the camera.[38] Perhaps, these same elements of Newton's pictures date back even earlier to the photographs of Norman Parkinson from the early 1950s. Notwithstanding such a long history of cinematic realism in fashion photography, I am in agreement with Kismaric and Respini on the heightened cinematic quality of the fashion editorial photography of the 1990s, which is also due, pragmatically, to the further tightening of bonds between photographers, stylists, hair and make-up artists, and art directors in the construction of the set, the narrative, and

[38] In the 1970s Newton began using high, low, and oblique camera angles more frequently, charging his subjects with eroticism: they looked aware of the camera, while spectacular settings were chosen for the enactment of erotic scenes in which the models had the demeanor of glamorous actresses.

the characters, as would happen in a film production. An example of the cinematic structuring of editorial spreads is provided by my first case study, “Paradise Lost” (which is explicitly inspired by a documentary), wherein the narrative is edited in a way that engages the viewer's imagination by interfolding scenes that do not follow a linear timeframe.

Fashion historian Alice Beard explains that narrative has been integral to fashion photo stories since their first appearance in the fashion magazines of the 1960s. This kind of fashion editorial feature, in fact, was conceived as a result of multiple factors: the growing creative autonomy of the photographer, the expanded readership base of magazines, increasing advertising budgets, and the popularity of television which stimulated image makers to create more eye-catching pictures. Such factors led to a reconfiguration of both fashion editorial photography and advertising, the latter becoming gradually less concerned with products and more interested in promoting “product images” (Beard 2002: 32). This testifies to a paradigmatic shift occurring within fashion photography in the 1960s: fashion photographers, heavily influenced by cinema and television, began using the fashion editorial as a platform for experimenting with cinematic techniques, hence manifesting a new inquisitive and documentary attitude toward the models as characters.

Due to the pre-eminence of the cinematic narrative over clothing in fashion editorial spreads, as explained at the beginning of this section, in the alternative publications of the 1990s clothing was showcased to the reader as part of a scenario wherein it no longer stood out: that is, clothing operated “as props forming part of the filmic *mise-en-scène*” (Beard: 34). In fact, “In ‘photo story’ features, fashion is subservient to aesthetic and visual form; clothing is not displayed clearly, but rather acts as costume for the narrative of the image” (42). Additionally, the garments were primarily used as bearers of attitudes and feelings, therefore offering themselves to the viewer as a means through which to embody a certain affective demeanor in real life. Thus, fashion editorials in this decade were fabricated by photographers and their teams as a result of their desire to tell a story inspired by art, cinema, or social events more than the urge to display the seasonal trends of the fashion collections. Fashion photography, through the experimental work of young photographers, transcended its commercial scope by extending its reach beyond the fashion industry hence claiming its own space among the other photographic genres and visual arts as well as demonstrating its active engagement with contemporary culture and society.

2.3 Aesthetic Feelings, Moods and Atmospheres in 1990s Fashion Imagery

Fashion historians have noticed how the fashion imagery of the 1990s was pervaded by themes of anxiety, morbidity, decadence, trauma, violence, alienation, depression, and death, verging toward the "noir" (Arnold 2001; Evans 2003). Rebecca Arnold explains that the grunge look of the decade "reflected a general dissolution, a feeling of hopelessness in a time of recession" when a general lack of optimism resulted in the collapse of any sense of collectivism. The recession of 1990, in fact, threatened job and housing security and, in the wake of an increased frustration and disillusionment toward government policies in both Britain and the United States, "a generation was created who felt alienated from a political system which seemed to have nothing to do with them and their concerns" (Arnold 2001: 51).

A trash realist aesthetic of fashion photography came to the fore in the mid-1990s alongside a slow economic recovery and remained somewhat emblematic of the decade, aiming to give voice to feelings of apathy and disaffection as well as to a sense of disenfranchisement from mainstream culture. Experimental fashion photographers and designers were devoting their creative energies to dismantling the long-standing ideal of "the fashionable body," giving form to a new aesthetic that refracted the social anxiety and instabilities proper to this stage of late capitalism (Granata 2017: 5). However, in the late-1990s, with a new surge in both consumer spending and corporate investments in editorial advertisements, glossy fashion magazines increased their circulation and sales, becoming the preferred communication channel of the rising global luxury brand industry. In this scenario of globalized capitalism, independent fashion magazines found themselves facing what I will describe as the brand advertisers' "takeover" of fashion media and therefore became more receptive to the mainstream, while still trying to retain a counter-hegemonic posture.

The experimental fashion photography of the 1990s—whose most significant elements are "its various plays with sex and gender, race and difference" (Solomon-Godeau 2004: 194)—embraced, in addressing the crisis of a sense of belonging among youth, "the instabilities, conflicts, and contradictions in sexuality" as a way to refashion selfhood (Craik 1994: 114). The emergence of preoccupations with sexuality in 1990s fashion photography should be understood by taking into consideration post-feminism, the AIDS crisis, the proliferation of gay and sexuality studies, the correlation between a new male consumerist ethos and the redefinition of masculinities, and the "culture wars" that created further

polarization on matters of abortion, immigration, privacy, censorship, gay and lesbian rights and drug use. In the face of frequent criticism regarding the frivolity of fashion photography, the alternative fashion publications in the 1990s played a pivotal role in expanding the notions and perceptions of masculinity and femininity in popular culture via the fashioning of oftentimes fluid and uncontainable identities. In doing so, fashion editorials of the period tapped into a wide range of visual forms and sources, such as art, film, television, gay subcultures and pornography (Steele 1996; Crane 2000).

According to photography theorist Val Williams, the concern of fashion photography with contemporary debates on gender and sexuality ought to be traced back, in what might seem a paradox, to the highly commodifying shots of female bodies by Helmut Newton and Harri Peccinotti for *Nova* in the 1960s. Despite feminist criticisms of Newton's misogynist pictures (Wallenberg 2010), according to Williams his work deconstructed the orthodoxies of female representations by imbuing these with ambiguity and challenging matters of power and agency, ultimately broadening the influence of fashion photography on discourses around gender and sexuality. As fashion scholar Jennifer Craik notes, the representation of sexuality in fashion photography throughout the 1960s became more explicit partly as a result of the influence of new-wave film: as filmic techniques were incorporated in the fashion photographic process, the norms of discretion and refinement that originated in the tradition of haute couture were rejected (1994: 108), and the body (and therefore notions of identity and sexuality) became more exposed, hence undermining the centrality of dress in fashion photographic representations. Moreover, the black-and-white reportage portraiture of the 1970s (such as Daniel Meadows's photographs of same-gender couples) as well as the introduction of working-class street styles in the work of photographers Terence Donovan, Brian Duffy and David Bailey for *Vogue* and *Elle* in the 1960s, equally expressed an urge for realism which had an effective impact on the narratives of the real that came to characterize the fashion photography of the 1990s (Williams 1998: 106).

What the 1990s realist fashion photographers (such as Corinne Day, Nigel Shafran, David Sims, Mario Sorrenti, Juergen Teller, and Wolfgang Tillmans) had in common was the intention to counteract the artificiality of fashion photography and the ideals it was propelled by with an at times shocking “dirty realism.” Desirability was supplanted by realness, glamour by grunge. Referencing a photo spread titled “Teenage Precinct Shoppers” (fig. 8) shot by Nigel Shafran for *i-D*, Williams writes that “it sought to provide substantial codes for a

generation which was rapidly assuming (in the face of the onslaught of Thatcherism) a distinctly apolitical stance" (1998: 102). Along these lines, the grunge aesthetic of the 1990s disrupted the aesthetic codes within the framework of fashion photography, for grunge had to do with vulnerability and unfamiliarity (Cotton 2000: 65), which were at odds with the aesthetic, affective, and moral scripts of mainstream fashion culture.

Figure 8. "Teenage Precinct Shoppers," ph. Nigel Shafran, *i-D*, 1990.

Different factors coalesced and filtrated into contemporary fashion editorials in the 1990s. The narratives began to revolve around characters speaking to the affective realities of contemporary youth, which were translated editorially through ordinary clothing styles bearing marks of dissatisfaction (e.g. the rips and cuts of distressed vintage looking garments, on which I will linger in the analysis of my first case study in the next chapter). The fashion credits at the bottom of the page, captioning the clothing in the pictures, repeatedly read "model's own" or "stylist's own": these signs of realness, by accounting for the personal involvement of models and stylists in the construction of the story, reduced the gap between reality and fiction. In the attempt to portray the "real life" of youth, plausible locations such as suburban cityscapes and domestic interiors were chosen as photographic sets: unglamorous and banal settings were used as frames to stage what was intended to pass as life ordinariness. This real life as depicted in fashion photography had the tone of a rather unhappy life vis-à-vis the fantasy images of the good life constructed in fashion. As fashion editor Elliott Smedley explains (2013), "anti-glamour" could operate in a vacuum opened by

the unattainability of the ideals of beauty and fantasies of upward mobility disseminated by glossy publications. I would add that such realist style took shape in the wake of the anti-establishment sentiments prevalent within 1980s Thatcherist Britain and expressed by indie magazines like *The Face* and *i-D* through post-punk and "New Romantic" styles.

Figure 9. Untitled, ph. Hannah Starkey, 1998.

Fashion theorist Alistair O'Neill has sketched a history of the reconfiguration of landscapes of deprivation and abandonment as settings for the fashion photography of the late 1990s, focusing in particular on Hannah Starkey's pictures (fig. 9). He argues that the indifference and disconnection in her photographic subjects illuminate the structure of feeling of the period and find a precedent in alienation as a rejoinder to the increased industrialization and urbanization of the nineteenth century. He relates such alienated indifference to the stylization of "*ennui* as existential derelict pose" in the post-war period and explains that Starkey's images, contrary to the angst of the punk style, bear a vacancy that is without intent: "as scenarios of boredom they are not expressive of vitality or movement, but what can be described as 'drift.'" Deriving this concept from the Situationists, O'Neill speaks of an affirmation of stillness and inertia in response to the pace of the city: a form of resistance to speed as an indicator of fashion. Such an anti-fashion stance promotes stasis over movement, imagination over change (O'Neill 2007: 219-220). I will explain how this "hanging out" of bored photographed subjects in the photo stories published in *Dutch*,

revealing feelings of exclusion and alienation, was staged by image makers as a way of negotiating their anxiety about their own positioning in relation to the industry (and, by extension, to consumer capitalism). Christopher Breward also underscores that 1990s independent fashion photography challenged the industry for the first time; capturing what I believe is most importantly at stake, he writes: “Whilst the fashion image has always operated as a benchmark of standards of taste and beauty, rarely has its message so challenged the very premise upon which fashion culture is built” (2003: 129).

Figure 10. Donna Mitchell and Alexis de Waldner, ph. Bob Richardson, *Vogue Paris*, 1967.

Instances of alienation and desolation had precursors in the history of fashion photography. As curator Martin Harrison observes, Bob Richardson in the 1960s “began telling stories with his camera, tales of woe with abandoned women waiting at gravesides or skulking in cafes.” Richardson's pictures progressively turned to sexuality, becoming more provocative in the late 1960s, with female models sensually smoking cigarettes (fig. 10): he became known as “the first drugs photographer” whose pictures “evoked a stoned ambience of which it is highly probable that the photographer himself was part” (Harrison 1985: 46-48). Richardson's hazy shots, as well as his penchant for gloomy moods, owe much to Deborah Turbeville, who was his editor at *Harper's Bazaar*. Yet, whereas both photographers privileged atmosphere over a polished technique, their themes are diametrically opposed: while Richardson was imbuing his pictures with eroticism, Turbeville's photographs became popular

for depicting women in states of detachment, combining “passive, laconic poses with expressions of unease and disenchantment” (fig. 11) (Harrison: 53).

Figure 11. “Women in the Woods,” ph. Deborah Turbeville, *Vogue Italia*, 1977.

Where critics such as Harrison have seen alienation in Turbeville's narratives, I see a poetic languor: her subjects inhabit an imaginative world without men which lends itself to feminist and lesbian readings. When Harrison states that “her [Turbeville's] fantasies, her melodramas, have further opened up the possibilities of illustrating fashion not directly but by a subtle process of obliquely hinting at its atmosphere,” he is on the right track: Turbeville emphasized atmospheric effects over actions, symptoms over manifestations. She introduced melancholia, vulnerability and, more broadly, the representation of existential feelings into fashion photography. As *Vogue* art director Alexander Liberman noted, “At a time when health and energy were being stressed, she brought a mysterious reminder that everything in life is not health and happiness” (cited in Harrison: 53). In the 1970s Turbeville’s aesthetic and themes went against the tide of male photographers such as Guy Bourdin, Helmut Newton and Chris von Wangenheim, who conceived “a world without men” (Newton 1984) with a perspective contrary to Turbeville's: in their case, men are absent inasmuch as they are behind the camera capturing exuberant women in action, whereas in Turbeville's stories we are taken into a women's world that skirts the male gaze. Both strands of 1970s fashion

photography have had a wide influence on ensuing developments of the genre. The former anticipates the trope of glamorized decadence in 1990s realist fashion pictures as well as the employment of cinematic techniques in the montage of the photo stories; the latter sparked a renewed interest for feelings which we reencounter through photo spreads in alternative fashion magazines during the second half of the decade, and contributed to expanding the visual taxonomy of female subjectivities in fashion photography.

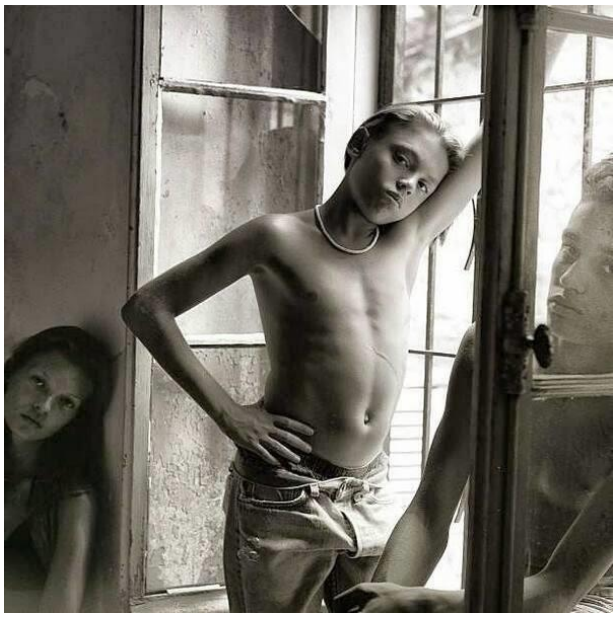


Figure 12. Kate Moss, Davide Sorrenti and Anthony Rey, ph. Mario Sorrenti, unpublished, 1992.

The portrayal of exhausted subjects living at the margins in 1990s fashion photography (fig. 12) signals a lack of affect which is nevertheless revealing of, in the words of scholar of rhetoric Katharine Wallerstein, the "emotionless emotion and passionate detachment" that led these figures to embody a style of disidentification with and a counter-cultural attitude toward society, as though the lack of affect was actually an excess of affect: in fact, "These figures [...] seem *determined* to show a lack of affect. They are not simply unsmiling, they are *resolutely* unsmiling. There is a deliberateness to their poses, an exaggeration to their unavailability" (1998: 147, original emphasis). These characters have been included in a genealogy of *flâneurs*, dandies, bohemians, and café dwellers whose poses were appropriated by youth counter-cultural styles in post-WWII Britain and America, and who bespoke an affective history of "disaffection, refusal, sexual ambiguity, and, most importantly, a cool distancing of the physical self and an aura of unavailability" (Wallerstein:

136). The post-teenage models in the vast majority of fashion photographs in the 1990s and early 2000s, as I will show in the next chapter, can be read, following Wallerstein, as queer in that through their physical thinness they express the refusal of category completion, namely of being gendered and sexualized by inhabiting childhood or adulthood. In capitalizing on the rhetoric of realism, the fashion photography of the 1990s foregrounds what only appears as lack of affect: the characters depicted, in fact, disengage from the expectation of attaining wholesomeness and fulfilment, refusing to have their bodies and lives classified and regulated.

Further, the casting of models not conforming to commonly accepted standards of beauty or to parameters of normative masculinity and femininity served the purpose of indexing realness as well as of possibly enticing an identification of the viewers with the "real people" in the photos. With the introduction of the ordinary, which lodges in the physical imperfections of the models as well as in their interrupted or abrupt movements, fashion photographers signified the real and posited everyday people and unremarkable looks against the commodity ideal. Following a reading of fashion photography along the lines of the critique of postmodern culture, one could argue that the fashion images of the time were indeed meticulously fabricated and staged in order to instill desire by commodifying as spectacle the very representation of unpretentious everyday life. In other words, by being published in magazines and being attentively styled in spite of their ostensible carelessness, fashion photographs inevitably imbue fashionability even in anti-fashion representations of clothed bodies. However, realism, as I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, was a stratagem through which independent image makers actively sought to contest the artificiality of the dominant fashion imagery. These fashion producers felt urged to find a collective space, beyond advertising, for expressing and circulating representations that were untethered from the imperatives of the "image industry" (McRobbie 2003). In a time in which the culture of fashion promoted neoliberalism's individualist ethos, what fashion photographers were trying to do was to establish a connection with magazine readers and to share with them a collective disalignment from the fashion industry as a capitalist infrastructure.

2.4 The Economy of Alternative Fashion Magazines

Fashion editorial photography is not merely a platform for exhibiting new fashions but also, most importantly, a world-making device. As British stylist Simon Foxton puts it:

> "I see editorial photography as being about crafting these separate little worlds. Working on the initial concept means getting a feeling for the world that exists in the photographs, the different emotions and perhaps new rules for dressing. It's like creating a little scenario. I'm not sure that's the right word but it's like writing a book and describing an environment, that sort of thing." (Quoted in Cotton 2000: 20)

Photographer David Sims, one of the leading figures in the independent fashion photography of the 1990s, describes the function of editorial photography as challenging the commercial culture of fashion and, with respect to his own editorial work from that time, he states:

> "Everything was focused on trying to put something in a magazine that would stimulate people to look beyond the usual parameters of what they thought a fashion picture was. [...] You can photograph a person, dress them, direct them to stand in a certain place or make them appear to exist in a certain environment, and you can create a narrative. That's what I identified with, the story-making element." (Quoted in Cotton 2000: 60)

Sims continues by explaining how the construction of characters in his practice is crucial and how these characters primarily function as carriers of emotions. The fashion photo story typically extends over an average of eight pictures, which are the result of an editing process that involves photographer, magazine editor, fashion editors, stylist, and art director.

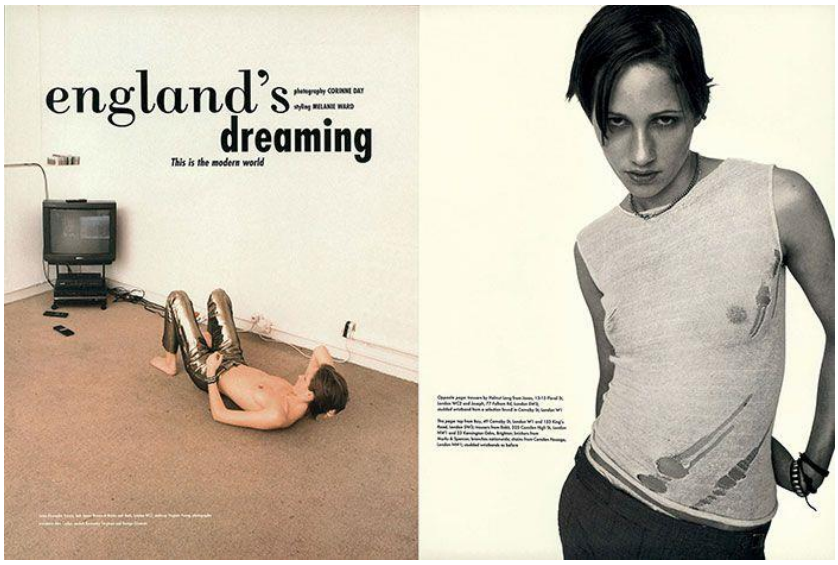


Figure 13. "England's Dreaming," ph. Corinne Day, *The Face*, August 1993.

In the late 1990s the line between fashion editorial and advertising became rather blurry, as luxury brands began seizing upon the creative energies of cutting-edge editorial photographers by hiring them to shoot advertisements that exceeded mere product display (with the ultimate goal, nevertheless, to create a certain aura around the brand, hence sparking the consumer's desire). A well-known example of this tendency is the "heroin-chic" (Arnold 1999) genre: this style of fashion photography portraying waifish models in sordid settings was pioneered by Corinne Day in her editorial work (fig. 13), and its tropes percolated into the commercial images of major luxury brands such as Calvin Klein. Art director Fabien Baron observes that the conflation of editorial and advertising was in large part due to the acquired prominence of the fashion stylists (to which I will return shortly) within the industry: working simultaneously for magazines and for advertisers, they bridged this divide by "infusing the design process with an editorial way of thinking" (quoted in Cotton 2000: 106), while at the same time, I would add, making sure that editorials were sufficiently commercial in terms of showcasing clothing that could be purchased in stores.

The alternative fashion magazines emerging in the 1990s, resembling collectible art books in their design, cover topics as broad as art, cinema, music, and literature. Moreover, they are monographic: each of their issues has a headline announcing its title and is dedicated to a specific theme. Not only the images but also the content of the accompanying text, the magazine layout and the typography—that is, the "formal textual features" (Ballaster 1991: 8)—play a key function in shaping both the aesthetic and the ideological address of the magazine. Although my dissertation explores images as privileged narratives for the production, visualization, and circulation of queer feelings due to their imaginative and figural force, the textuality of the magazine should at least be acknowledged: first, the narrative content of the feature articles, which, together with the images set the tone of the publication; second, its ekphrastic character in accompanying the images with text, specifically through the titles of issues and photo stories, in order to provide an element of contextualization (especially for photo stories that otherwise might be obscure). The graphic style is also a relevant element in the affective architecture of the magazine. Whereas in the style magazines of the 1980s graphics were subjected to continuous experimentation (for instance through the employment of multiple visual styles and operations such as *bricolage*), in the case of the magazine with which this dissertation is concerned the use of graphics is rather limited and unvaried, as can be seen in the typography.

In *Dutch*, the title of the photo story, printed in a small Arial font, is usually placed at the center of the page, and, right below the title, the name of the photographer is printed in an even smaller font. The text is in white or in black, and color is employed very sparingly. Alternatively, the story's title and photographer's name are printed on a white margin or on the lower half of the opening picture of a photo story. *Dutch* is among those fashion magazines that, as creative director Jeremy Leslie identifies, concentrate on the image above type (2000: 82). Such a minimal use of text in *Dutch* responds to three main aspects: the minimalist aesthetic in late 1990s fashion, with and within which the magazine operates; the editors' intention to "let the images speak," that is, to prioritize the visual narrative over the text by reducing the latter to a bare minimum; and the logic underlying the visual economy of the magazine, balancing the striking photographic experimentations of the photos with a sleek, essential, empty space that offers the readers moments of pause when reading the magazine. In addition, *Dutch*'s minimalist graphic style might be understood in light of Dutch graphic design history: design scholar William Owen explains that in terms of magazine design Dutch editors and art directors since the 1960s have been "intellectually well in advance of the English and Americans" for they "demonstrated a mature understanding of constructivism and the principles and function of plastic dynamism." Historically, the Netherlands have had a small commercial market which, however, was compensated by a vibrant cultural scene that encouraged designers to experiment in a time in which magazine designers elsewhere were bound by publishers' restrictions and fears of financial failure (Owen 1991: 113-114).

Writing about fashion photography in the early 2000s, art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau asserts that what the "demotic" and "populist" language of independent fashion photography produces is nothing more than "fashionable fictions" (2004: 197). It is helpful to take her criticism into account in order to gauge how slippery the distinctions between mainstream and independent fashion photography are. On this matter, it is pivotal to tease out who owned and published independent magazines in order to understand how the independent and mainstream genres came in part to conflate within the context of magazine production. *The Face*, for instance, relied in its infant stages on its editor Nick Logan's personal savings but in 1999 was bought by media business Emap (now Ascential), which also owned *Arena* (a spin-off of *The Face* launched in 1987) and *Arena Homme Plus* as part of its lifestyle division. This points to the increased interest among publishers in the late 1990s toward the

acquisition of fashion titles in order to expand, and make more fashionable, their portfolio and to capitalize on such titles as a way to generate revenues. In turn, the magazine itself benefits from being backed by a big publisher in that it is endowed with funds to invest primarily in photo shoot production and printing.

Evidently, the owners-publishers exert a pressure on the editorial team in order to ensure that the magazine generates profits: such pressure normally results in the necessity to mitigate content that could be perceived as disturbing and balance it out with "safer" written and visual elements, as well as to photograph models and clothes suitable to the readership's taste and expectations. More pragmatically, this economic pressure translates into the requirement for photographers to shoot clothing as neatly as possible, juxtaposing full-length shots and close-ups, and for stylists to feature as many runway collection pieces as they can obtain from the magazine's advertisers: this way, the potential consumer can be drawn to purchase the clothing shown in the "product image." The production of a fashion image is a collaboration process wherein different actors play an equally important role in the end result: the "fashion capital" (Rocamora 2002; 2009) is distributed across different players who operate in synergy, with their respective specialized knowledge and practices. This interplay of responsibilities evinces the necessity to account for multiple voices in the analysis of fashion image-making.

In the 1990s, the figure of the stylist, which rose to prominence as an evolution of the women's magazines' "sittings editor," came to be regarded as the most important actor in revamping the image of fashion houses, magazines, and even promoting the careers of young photographers, models, make-up artists, and other creative talent. Luxury brands started seeing in fashion stylists a possible source of profit and the stylists themselves acquired further visibility and power within the fashion system by channeling their creative energies both into the commercial and artistic realms. The stylists who worked alongside photographers for style magazines such as *The Face* and *i-D* in the 1980s, while concomitantly styling ad campaigns for high-end fashion houses, came to embody the hybrid profile of the actors involved in fashion magazine production.[39] When working for independent magazines

[39] It is worth noting, however, that this interplay of actors in the production of fashion photographs had begun earlier in the 1960s: at *Nova*, for instance, Harri Peccinotti was both the art director and a staff photographer; another example is offered by the career of Deborah Turbeville, who had started out as a model in the late 1950s, turned to photography in the early 1960s, and worked as both a stylist and photographer in the early 1970s.

they received no financial support from the editors and could not claim any formal affiliation with the publication: they were in charge of securing clothing for the photo shoots from different sources—usually shopping at markets or scavenging their or friends' wardrobes, making clothes from scratch or customizing them—and of street casting, and eventually their creativity became indispensable for the conceptualization of a photo story.

In the early 1990s, alternative magazines *Purple* (1992-), *Self Service* (1993-), and *Dutch* (1994-2002) came to epitomize an evolution of the style publications of the 1980s. As art writer Jeff Rian explains, during the "economic lull" between 1987 and 1992 (after the stock market crash of 1987) computers became cheaper and more available, and this sparked desire for new experimentations in magazine design: he attributes the emergence of a new genre of fashion magazines showing "models in simpler poses, often frankly naked instead of sculpturally nude […] and often in an everyday setting instead of a photographer's backdrop" to the diffusion of new technology and the desire for rethinking the visual tropes that had characterized fashion magazines (2002: 124). Art directors Ezra Petronio and Suzanne Koller, co-founders of *Self Service*, established the magazine as a branch of their pre-existing business, an acclaimed creative and consulting agency (Petronio Associates, formerly Work in Progress) for the fashion and beauty industries; *Purple* was co-founded by art writers Olivier Zahm and Elein Fleiss and after a few years served as a jumping-off platform to create a publishing house (Purple Books), a literary magazine (*Purple Fiction*, 1995-1998), a magazine devoted to sexuality (*Purple Sexe*, 1998-2001), and even an art gallery in Paris (Purple Gallery). These respective histories are proof that some alternative fashion magazines "are thus also part of branding strategies of fashion labels or creative agencies as brand extensions" (Dyson 2007). Despite their differences—*Self Service* remaining consistent with its original small-scale ethos and *Purple* expanding in different directions—both magazines gradually increased the number of advertisers featured in their pages: a symptom of the assimilation of the independent press into the fashion system. The alliance of luxury brands with alternative fashion magazines became so tight that they frequently joined forces in the creation of fashion advertorials, namely advertisements in the form of editorial content, today published on both magazines' and brands' websites.

Such a practice illuminates the slipperiness of the independent fashion magazine as a cultural product: it operates within the context of capitalist consumption while enacting, with its fashion stories, fantasies that counteract the very lifestyle typically associated with that

same context. These particular tendencies have underpinned the production of non-mainstream fashion magazines since the 1990s. As art historian Patrik Andersson says, in reference to independent magazines: "Attempts to establish and maintain an 'independent' position that stands out in the visual and conceptual field usually succeed in doing so only for a brief moment in time as their dialectics become absorbed and homogenized into mass culture" (2002: 16). Today, any marked distinctions between mainstream and independent fashion magazines have become opaque: with independent titles largely resorting to advertisers in order to finance the production of their fashion stories, on one side, and glossy publications featuring in their pages youth street styles to expand their readership, on the other, their respective aesthetics have partially homogenized. Furthermore, to think of fashion photography in terms of a static duality of mainstream/independent would obliterate the blurry areas of overlap and inconsistency that are actually a key feature in contemporary fashion photography. In this light, the hybridized nature of alternative fashion magazines, which mix popular culture with underground art, music and high-end fashion, hence bringing together the establishment with the avantgarde and fusing art, fashion, and commerce, has recently been unpacked.

Fashion scholar Ane Lynge-Jorlén stresses that although they are situated outside of the mainstream, "hybrid fashion magazines"—which she defines as "small-scale independent fashion magazines that merge high fashion with art and style cultures, often targeting both men and women" (2012: 8-9)—are not outside commercial interests. According to her, albeit primarily concerned with creative self-fulfillment they are nonetheless motivated by the need to generate revenue. This is not entirely accurate inasmuch as alternative fashion magazines are typically self-funded by the editors and their financial ambition is to generate enough sales to be able to sustain themselves, not to generate actual profit: the main goal of publishing an "avantgarde" fashion magazine is, in fact, to be able to circulate images that reflect, anticipate, or challenge, a certain ethos (and perhaps to accrue cultural capital and visibility). Nevertheless, it is true that they are, de facto, linked to the fashion industry for they are regularly consulted by fashion industry professionals for research and inspiration; they operate according to the same mechanisms that sustain the functioning of mainstream

publications;[40] and at times collaborate with established fashion houses by shooting "exclusives" (or "specials": photo spreads featuring only the clothing from a specific designer's collection) for the sake of mutual visibility. This description outlines the generic features of alternative fashion magazines; however, as I will explain in the next section of this chapter, there are exceptions: *Dutch* was an alternative fashion magazine that had a more complex history and relationship with commerce.

It is pertinent to stress that there are, indeed, noticeable differences between fashion photo stories published in alternative publications and those in mainstream titles. To provide an example, configurations of non-normative masculinities and femininities are still rare in glossy titles; today, the latter occasionally feature "homonormative" subjects, such as gay men at the helm of successful businesses, and the affective tonalities of their stories tend to point to positive, or happy, feelings. As I will demonstrate with my case studies, fashion stories that do not comply with such codes of representation add a new layer to the aesthetic experience of reading a fashion magazine. Whereas the reader of a glossy magazine expects, generally speaking, to be confronted with standardized ideals of beauty and the desire to approximate them, the reader engaging with fashion spreads that present less transparent narratives and wherein clothing is not foregrounded is required to make a bigger effort to decode what is occurring in the fiction of the scene: such reader might be confronted with their own ambivalence in relation to what occurs in the photographic narrative and, as a result, may experience the image in the form of discomfort, uneasiness, or bewilderment. These feelings destabilize the dynamics of idealization and identification underlying the experience of fashion magazines' consumption, thereby making this experience more open and creative.

As art historian Kaja Silverman lays out, the subjects who aspire to incarnate a certain ideal, generally speaking, derive their understanding of that ideal from normative representation and, in being invested in normative ideals they are "deprived of any capacity to put its images to new uses, or to work transformatively upon them. This subject can only passionately but passively reaffirm the status quo" (1996: 40). Although this is a general claim (and Silverman herself concedes that idealization "can [also] open up identifications which

[40] I am referring to: the logistics of borrowing clothes via the press offices of fashion houses to feature these in fashion editorials, usually in exchange for advertisements placed by the brands in the pages of the magazine; the commissioning of the fashion stories; and the casting process through modeling agencies.

would otherwise be foreclosed by the imperatives of normative representation and the ego" [40-41]), it is nevertheless applicable to the typical mode of consumption of fashion images implied by commercial fashion magazines, whose repetitive valorization of certain looks and body types elevates these last to the status of normative ideals. However, as the case studies will illustrate, alternative magazines may offer a glimpse into the negativity, or ambivalence, of existence, calling the viewer to grapple with affective scenes that are not necessarily aspirational, happy, or "good." The readers are, thus, drawn into a more thoughtful reading (Cotton 2016: 51) and are urged to rethink their own expectations and ideas of what is worthy of representation and what may be desirable beyond the ideals upheld by fashion and popular media.

2.5 *Dutch* Magazine: Style and Labor

In reaction to the beauty standards and style conventions of the glossy fashion magazines, editors such as Nick Logan (founder of *The Face*) and Terry Jones (of *i-D*) in the 1980s self-funded their fanzine-style magazines to promote the work of emerging fashion talents: they were both producers and consumers of their own magazines as they were directly immersed in the style culture that informed the aesthetic of their editorial projects (Lynge-Jorlén 2017: 25). The style of fashion photography pioneered by these magazines was "street" and "straight-up": as opposed to heavily produced fashion shoots featuring professional fashion models, this first new wave of independent style publications celebrated ordinary-looking people wearing inexpensive, often thrift-store or customized yet creatively styled clothing with a seeming disregard for fashion and trends (Rocamora and O'Neill 2008: 186). This "personal" style of representation of "real people" and "identities" lost purchase in the 1990s but would have a comeback in the early 2000s with the exponential success of street-style blogs.

In the 1990s, magazines like *Dutch, Purple*, and *Self-Service*, inspired by the anti-fashion impetus of the 1980s style magazines, surfaced on the market (*Dutch* in Amsterdam, *Purple* and *Self Service* in Paris). In comparison to *Purple* and *Self Service*, *Dutch*, with fewer advertisements and the scarcity of actual clothing in its pages, had a much less tangible relationship with the industry. Additionally, its creative personnel was not actively

participating in the lifestyle and social events that drew together creative professionals in fashion capitals such as London, Paris, and New York: *Dutch*, in fact, even when it relocated its offices from Amsterdam to Paris, remained somewhat at the edges of the fashion milieu. As I mentioned earlier, its fashion stories were characterized by a relative absence of clothing, initially out of necessity and then as a choice. Due to the limited funds invested in the magazine and the initial lack of solid relationships with fashion companies (which typically supply the clothing for photo shoots and are in charge of placing print advertisements), at the beginning they could barely afford to include any designer garments in their pages. Despite, or precisely thanks to, this lack of clothing, *Dutch*'s fashion photographers and editors shaped a style of image-making that, as I will show in the case studies, was unprecedented in the visual culture of fashion. When the financial circumstances of *Dutch* changed, with the magazine's increased reputation leading to external investments, its print-run and content increased and yet it largely maintained its signature aesthetic.

As opposed to the other aforementioned fashion magazines from the 1990s, the personnel of *Dutch* was predominantly gay: a factor that, to a certain extent, might explain the magazine's aesthetic sensitivity and commitment to pushing magazine readers to engage with sexual, social, and moral discourses that neither traditional women's magazines nor less commercial ones (e.g. *Purple* and *Self Service*) were accustomed to dealing with. Despite not instigating specifically homoerotic identifications or advancing identitarian claims, *Dutch* nonetheless proliferated queer visual discourses which might be understood in view of its editors' impatience with the visual ideologies of fashion and lifestyle publications. *Dutch* was also visually responding to the success of men's lifestyle magazines: *FHM* ("For Him Magazine," 1985-), *Maxim* (1995-), and *Loaded* (1994-2015) mediated a "laddish" culture of heterosexual sex, sport, and drinking (Shinkle 2008: 91) which, coupled with the "empowered" feminine ideology advocated in the glossies, provided a playground for the production of heteronormative and elitist discourses which pervaded mainstream fashion culture.

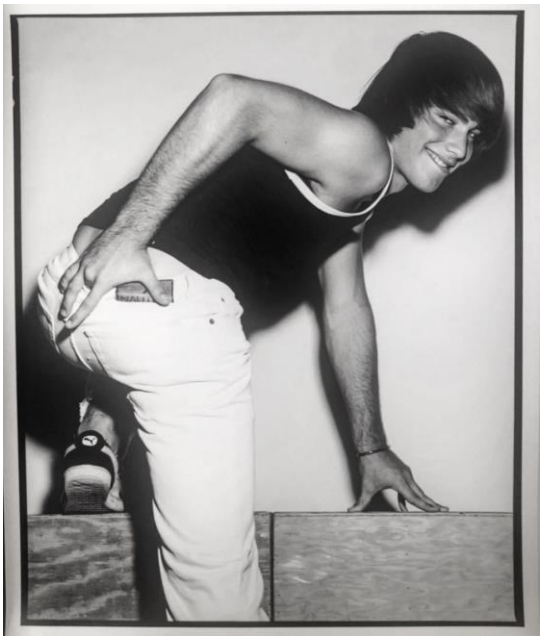


Figure 14. “Plug of flesh,” ph. Matthias Vriens, *Dutch* #40, 2002.

Creative director and editor-in-chief Matthias Vriens played a decisive role in shaping the magazine’s content: a self-identified “gay photographer,” editor, and art-director, interested in bare flesh and sexuality (Scherer 2020), he commissioned and shot some of the most visually confrontational and humorous stories in the history of *Dutch*. In a black and white editorial titled “Plug of flesh” (fig. 14), which blatantly references Mapplethorpe’s portraits, young male models play with their butts and expose their genitalia while sneering or giggling. The spread demonstrates Vriens’s commitment to introducing into the magazine queer visual material that was outside of the domain of fashion without either dissimulating it or elevating it to the status of art: the nonsensical exhibitionism of his subjects was an experiment in testing how humor could be used to abdicate fashion modeling scripts as well as the expectations of formal perfection placed on a published fashion image, usually the outcome of an overzealous editing process.

It was due to arresting images which avoided clear-cut understandings and codifications of masculinity and femininity that *Dutch* acquired resonance and popularity as an “avantgarde” magazine. In an interview, Vriens (who acted as fashion director of the publication between 1994 and 1996 and then as its editor-in-chief from 1997 to 2000) explained that it was precisely through a liberal approach to sexuality and identity that they were able to attract, and commission work from, well-known fashion photographers such as Steven Klein. Vriens himself stated that *Dutch* “was more liberal than the existing magazines,

intelligent and really free with regard to sexuality," and, as fashion scholar José Teunissen puts it, "Vriens seem(ed) to be deliberately pushing the boundaries of what can be published in a magazine. [...] For him it is a means of contributing to the gradual dissolution of all manner of habitual and prejudiced ideas about sex and corporeality" (2015: 64-66). In Vince Aletti's words: "Vriens tweaks masculinity and toys with the fluidity of gender, queering everything in sight" (2019: 334).

As opposed to *Purple* and *Self Service*, which are still running, *Dutch* was discontinued after only eight years, most likely due to the increasing economic pressure that came with the publishers' attempt to coopt the title into the commercial arena. It is perhaps due to the editors' reticence to become entrapped in capitalist logics of magazine production that, in hindsight, the magazine has become iconic in art and fashion circles: its issues are extremely difficult to find as they had a small print run and are now owned solely by private collectors and are held by very few Dutch library archives. Although *Dutch* certainly resisted assimilation more successfully than the other alternative titles, once it faced the prospect of becoming more popular it began to open up to the international fashion market through the involvement of well-known photographers and to receive support from brand advertisers. The history of *Dutch* is rather obscure as no other explication for its folding, besides the mention of unspecified disagreements between the editor and the publisher, can be discerned from fashion industry sources (Mensink 2011). Launched by photographer Sandor Lubbe, who had found in Mercurius a publisher willing to produce a unique fashion magazine in The Netherlands, *Dutch* originally aimed at the Dutch market and all its articles were written in Dutch; after only a few issues it was bought by Audax, which took on the project of opening the magazine to international markets, switching the language of the articles from Dutch to English, thus making the title increasingly famous among fashion and art connoisseurs.

The type of photographic narratives published in the magazine, as the next chapters will show, conveyed a queer sensibility. For instance, the figures of the asocial violent teenager, the gay porn actor, or the spaced-out suburban girl, i.e. all subjects in a position of possible social disenfranchisement, recur in the narratives of *Dutch* magazine, having as precursors the style publications of the 1980s, gay zines, erotic magazines, hixploitation movies, New Queer Cinema, and documentary photography. These characters bear witness to a sensibility which collides with the rather clichéd identity representations found in more

commercially oriented imagery. The upbeat moods that orchestrate the templates of mainstream magazines are here challenged through the staging of affective scenarios that account for complex, nuanced, contradictory, indeterminate dimensions of our lives, ultimately inducing us to question our own desires and identifications.

It could be observed that an emphasis on queer visual discourses in the production of a fashion magazine does not imply that such a magazine ceases to participate in a neoliberalist economy wherein creative production is subsumed to a logic of depoliticized individualism and success. On such premises, it would also be legitimate to advance that the "aggressive neo-liberal underpinning of immaterial labour" that inflects the creative practices within the new cultural industries might defuse their radical potential (McRobbie 2010: 69-70). The dilemma around the possible commercial value of "subcultural capital" (Thornton cited in McRobbie 2016: 8) and the cooptation of countercultural critique by capitalism is still a thorny one (its origins hark back at least to the Frankfurt School and, later, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies). More generally, however, the idea that artistic critique has become part and parcel of the vocabulary of creative practitioners who negotiate a convenient relationship with industry has become a truism. Although my dissertation does not study modes of cultural production and issues of labor and creativity in the fashion economy, it is important here to at least acknowledge that *Dutch* surfaced on the market, with very little money, within a context in which casual and flexible art professionals were part of a workforce of self-employed cultural producers willing to invest in collaborative projects and produce cultural value outside of the market, while to some degree inevitably compromising with it.

Dutch functioned both as a platform of self-expression for individual image makers hired on a freelance basis within a creative economy marked by increasing levels of precarity and as a visually powerful medium for circulating conflicting energies and diversified voices of resistance against the markedly upper-middle-class, white and heteronormative contours of the fashion industry. Operating within the field of a low pay (or no pay at all) casual economy, its editors sought to create a magazine that challenged mainstream aesthetics, while at the same time increasingly securing collaborations with fashion advertisers in order to keep their business afloat; those advertisers, usually established fashion brands, supported the magazine in view of the popularity it was accruing in fashion and art circles for its striking visual content: what they hoped to obtain in return, more than seeing their clothing featured

in the pages, was to have their brand associated, in the eyes of the magazine readers and potential consumers, with the countercultural appeal suffused throughout the magazine.

Dutch can be considered one of the first fashion magazines in which indie and mainstream strikingly coexisted. It was the first instance of a fashion magazine in which the glossy quality of mainstream titles, which had been adamantly rejected by the style publications of the 1980s (that celebrated radical street styles with an anti-fashion impetus), was merged with the rawer content of documentary photography. More specifically, whereas the scenes of asociality, obscenity, or sexual ambiguity featured in *Dutch* counteracted the aspirational imagery of mainstream fashion, such photo stories were indeed published in a magazine with a sleek, sophisticated aesthetic and one which, at the time of its internationalization, included international high-end designers in its credits. Because it still, to a certain degree, operated in conjunction with the capitalist logics of the fashion industry, *Dutch* cannot be considered fully independent (for this reason, I prefer the term "alternative" to describe it). Nevertheless, it provided a space for the enactment of lateral aesthetics, thus warranting novel modes of fashion magazine readership, to the point that, as the case studies will make clear, it should be considered the magazine mainly responsible for ushering queer visual discourses into the culture of fashion at the turn of the twenty-first century.

The idiosyncratic aesthetic of *Dutch* also ensued from the geographical context in which the magazine was produced. The Dutch market was not dominated (as were the British, the French, the Italian, and the American) by major glossy publications: these were either completely absent or they surfaced on the editorial market only briefly and late (to give an example: the Dutch edition of *Harper's Bazaar* ran from 1986 to 1990, and *Vogue Nederland* has been published only since 2012, whereas the American *Vogue* was founded in 1892, *British Vogue* first appeared in 1916, and *Vogue Paris* in 1920).[41] It is in view of this market

[41] *Avenue*, considered the Dutch equivalent of *Nova*, was the leading women's magazine (and one of very few) in the Netherlands. It was founded in 1965 as a lifestyle magazine that would inject an attitude of carefreeness in the post-war years by paying attention to art, fashion, literature, travel, food, and social and political developments. Within a context of sweeping social changes such as economic growth, reduction in family size, democratization and secularization, both in the Netherlands and in western countries more broadly, *Avenue* was an important channel through which "the stuffy, hidebound and thrifty Netherlands of the post-war reconstruction years was introduced to more modern customs and traditions" (Lamoree 2015: 29). Moreover, with the shift to a youth-oriented consumer culture, the rhetoric of women's magazines changed and their tone became less prescriptive and more encouraging of individual style expression (Feitsma 2017: 73-74). The Netherlands was, in fact, particularly affected by the youth culture in the 1960s, which led to its highly liberal reputation and a cult of individualism and informality that deeply informed the local fashion (Smelik 2017: 10). Although *Avenue* was still a fairly ordinary women's magazine, its open attitude toward innovation carved out a

gap, in conjunction with the spreading influence of 1980s British style publications, that young Dutch magazine creators started their own innovative magazines, and, as a consequence, fashion and fashion photography began flourishing in the Netherlands (Teunissen 2015: 8).

In *Dutch*, soft-porn snapshots of male models taken by Matthias Vriens were juxtaposed with Corinne Day's trashy stories or Steven Klein's somber narratives. A sexualized imagery cohabited with the vernacular and the prosaic in its photographic narratives. As fashion scholar Agnès Rocamora observes, fashion magazines are constituents of "fashion media discourse": by producing fashion features, photo spreads, and advertisements they operate intertextually, referencing films, novels, and music videos, and thereby shaping larger textual and visual discourses on femininities and masculinities (2009: 58). Looking at *Dutch* through an intertextual lens, it is easy to see that glossy and raw, fashion and anti-fashion, are enmeshed, and this is rendered particularly explicit in the written content of the magazine, where pieces on "dyke style," drag queens and subcultures are featured alongside more formulaic reports on runway shows and collections.

On the one hand, the occasional presence of advertisements from luxury brands and the glamorous coffee table format are two features that originate in the logics of mainstream publishing; on the other hand, the "street casting," the combination of designer clothing with vintage pieces (or garments belonging to the stylist or the model), a clashing mix of high and low in the editorial content, and the showcasing of diverse styles of masculinity and femininity, are all elements derived primarily from independent publications and zines. This interweaving of seemingly conflicting elements shows how an alternative magazine like *Dutch* was both a cultural product and a producer implicated in the negotiation of a social and artistic impetus with commercial demands. It was precisely this hybrid nature that allowed the magazine to leave a mark in the history of fashion: a mark that, in the following generation of fashion magazines, registered as an increase of queer and politically inflected content, which would have been previously unimaginable in the visual culture of fashion.

On the side of consumption, I am inclined to think that aesthetic identification with non-normative styles of performing one's subjectivity and, more broadly, a taste for or

space in the Dutch market for more experimental editorial concepts, of which *Dutch* could be considered emblematic. In addition to *Dutch*, other Dutch magazines such as *Blvd.*, *Re-Magazine*, *The Gentlewoman*, *Fantastic Man*, and *Zoo* contributed to sealing the reputation of Dutch magazine editors and fashion photographers as groundbreaking and trend-setting in the international fashion markets.

interest in fringe aesthetics and discourses were the chief draw for the readers of *Dutch*. The attitudes embodied in fashion magazines have an influence in shaping how readers relate with each other and present themselves in their everyday life: in this sense, magazines create imaginative spaces that readers can rely on and hold on to in order to experience a sense of collective belonging. Fashion magazines can also function, as I have mentioned in the previous chapter, as connectors of collective feelings, desires, and aspirations. Moved by the interest in how readers-viewers might come to be part of a collectivity, in the next section I will discuss *Dutch*'s public and mode of address.

2.6 *Dutch* and Its Publics

Critical theorist Nancy Fraser (1990), engaging with Habermas's concept of "the public sphere" (1962), defines "subaltern counterpublics" as those publics, composed of members of subordinated groups, that are formed as a response to the exclusions undertaken within the dominant public sphere. As discursive spaces of political contestation, they can bring to the fore issues that have been ignored or suppressed by dominant publics. On similar grounds, feminist literary theorist Rita Felski (1989) developed a model of an oppositional "feminist public sphere" centered on how, within late capitalist societies, multiple and diverse sites of oppositionality have surfaced to affirm the specificities (in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and so forth) of particular groups and to express alternative values from the homogenizing global mass culture. A "counter-public sphere" is one through which a marginalized group that shares a common experience of oppression can articulate dissent. Books, journals, and magazines are key instruments in the project of disseminating oppositional ideas and values. With this goal, due to the intermingling of state and society in late capitalism, a public sphere cannot fully operate outside commercial and institutional structures if it wants to reach a vast audience and alter norms and social patterns. With regard to the feminist public sphere with which she is concerned, Felski reevaluates the political potential of popular forms such as women's magazines, television, and rock music, which, despite not being "revolutionary" per se, can have a substantial impact on the delineation of a feminist presence in culture and society in light of the widespread participation of women in the shaping and consumption of these forms.

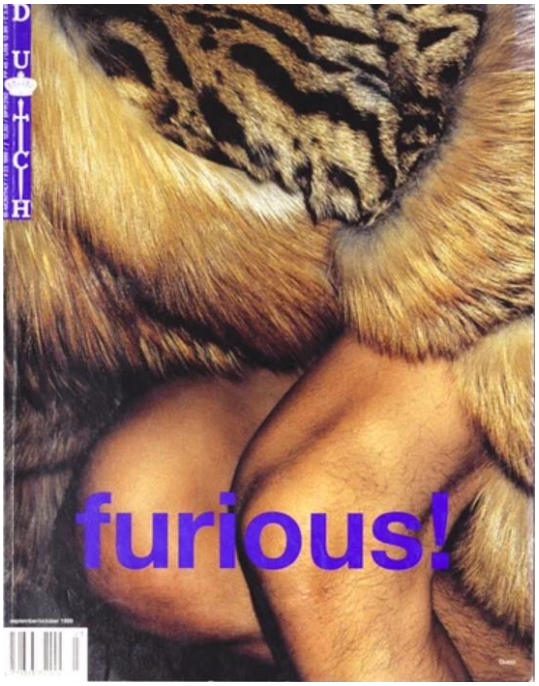
If the women's magazine has played an important role in the development of feminine cultures through which women could find a sense of community and enter the public sphere, the alternative fashion press which carved a market for itself throughout the 1990s could be seen as participating in the formation of a magazine sub-public or counterpublic. Books, journals, advertisements, plays, and poems, according to queer social theorist Michael Warner (2002), address an imaginary public: one that is not "unreal" but whose existence depends on the experience of recognizing oneself as being addressed by a text while also sensing that one is not the only addressee. To put it in Warner's words: "Our subjectivity is understood as having resonance with others, and immediately so" (2002: 58). In this sense, a public comes into being only insofar as it finds itself being addressed by a certain discourse: a discourse that is proffered with the presupposition of knowledge of previously existing discourses. The public, however, is not the passive recipient of speech; instead, its members volitionally join in a lifeworld.

The most compelling aspect of Warner's model of public culture, for the purpose of my discussion of the alternative fashion press, is the primacy of what he calls "stranger-sociability" (56): insofar as a public is composed of strangers who share membership by virtue of their affiliation on the level of belief, identity, vocation, or taste, they voluntarily participate in a social imaginary and therefore come to share a sense of commonality *as* strangers. Their mode of "stranger-relationality" is predicated on the background assumption of having "something"—perhaps a sensibility—in common. They involve themselves as strangers in the imaginary uptake of a social world (which is also, inevitably, a mood-world), thereby bringing about a hope for transformation. The very possibility of transformation in the encounter among strangers and fellow members of a counterpublic is enabled by the affective reflexivity generated by the cultural forms in question: the ensuing circulation of further discourses and representations, in fact, might bring into being embodied ways of life.

Dutch addressed itself to a readership of fashion and style enthusiasts who had grown frustrated with the visual discourses through which the available fashion imagery tied and subjected itself to a mainstreamed imagination. For this reason, the readership of *Dutch* could be said to be a sub-public of fashion magazine readers. These interlocutors were also, presumably, immersed in adjacent cultures and publics (such as independent cinema and music and/or queer subcultures). *Dutch* addressed a public that was imaginary, in the sense that its existence was not tested empirically, but it was perceived to have a social basis and

therefore “to be there” and to be capable of taking up the magazine’s cues. The reflexive circulation of *Dutch*’s discourse was enabled by the members’ recognition of and familiarity with the dominant visual discourses to which *Dutch* was responding. With an impersonal mode of address that presumed and aimed at a readership of both women and men, *Dutch* inserted itself into a cross-citational discursive field whereby fashion reportages and celebrity designer profiles were juxtaposed with more investigative pieces on queer subcultures and fetishes: all of which were expected to be of interest for an audience in search of a mode of address distinct from that of the popular fashion magazine.

In his work on counterpublics, Warner highlights how in media consumption reflexivity is managed via affect (2002: 71). Not only does affect move in a feedback loop between text/image and reader/viewer, but it is also what in the first place moves us toward the embracing of a particular idea, view, or position. In *Dutch*, affect is put into operation primarily through the photo stories: its textual apparatus, inclusive of articles and captions, is indeed relevant in contextualizing a photo spread as well as in more explicitly tackling, in the written form, the interests of both editors and readers; however, text is subordinate to the photographic narrative, with its attempt to emotionally involve the reader-viewer. In the case studies I will show how *Dutch* created scenes of unfamiliarity and discomfort in order to lure its audience into becoming alert to the strange, the ambiguous, the non-transparent and to incite them to reconceive of fashion magazine reading as a practice guided by the willingness to be disoriented and reoriented, in one’s affective attachments, toward ideas and bodies that eclipsed the parameters of the fashionable. To the extent that *Dutch* yielded queer energies as a strategy for reconfiguring the visual sphere of fashion, perhaps its success would not have been possible had it completely disavowed the same commercial and institutional frameworks it sought to oppose.



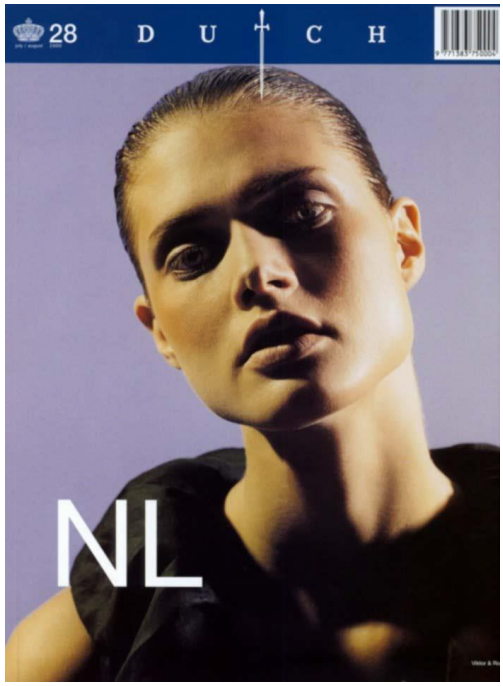


Figure 15. *Dutch* cover #23, 1999, ph. Matthias Vriens. Figure 16. *Dutch* cover #28, 2000, ph. Cometti.

The vernacular style of many of its photo stories was frequently in conflict with that of the more traditional fashion pictures often chosen for its covers. By way of example, humorous cover pictures such as of a man's bare legs wrapped in a fur coat for an issue titled "Furious!" (#23, 1999) (fig. 15) or of Sudanese-British model-activist Alek Wek shot from the back, on all fours, for the issue "Wet wet wet!" (#22, 1999), alternate with rather standard close-up portraits of popular models, like Carolyn Murphy (for issue #10, 1997) and Guinevere Van Seenus (on issue #28, 2000) (fig. 16). *Dutch* found itself continuously engaging with and reshuffling dominant visual codes: this encapsulates the tension between an oppositional impetus and the institutional market constraints that both Felski and Warner deem integral to the formation of counterpublics. In view of this tension, the editors (and readers) of *Dutch* could be seen as having transferred their own anxiety about being excluded from visual representation in the visual public sphere into the very making of the magazine. I would argue that this tension between a countercultural energy and a desire to belong is managed through what appears as a contradiction in the visual discourse of the magazine but which is actually coherent with the argument for a non-prescriptive visual sphere directed outward toward society at large.

Jonathan Flatley writes that "in seeing how a particular formal practice addresses itself to a collective of readers whom it is trying to affect, we can also see how it contains a theory

of those readers and the historical situation they find themselves in" (2017a: 144). The creative personnel of *Dutch* developed a hybrid discourse, presuming knowledge of and interest in the fashion system while staging scenes in which the principal actors were those very subjects who had been marginalized by the infrastructures of that system. In so doing, it looped its readers into the collective negotiation of their shared ambivalent relationship with the fashion industry and, by extension, with consumer culture. The visual discourse of *Dutch* could also be understood as transposing the anxiety about battling the norms of the market onto its photographed subjects. As the case studies will show, by giving a platform to characters who were, in varied ways, disenfranchised from the world of capital, the magazine enticed its readers to actively contest bodily constraints and moral expectations as well as to consider new modes of socialization and ideo-affective postures. That this was done in the context of a magazine which did not entirely renounce engagement with the fashion system warrants the actual possibility of channeling its messages into society as a whole.

I interpret the social, political, and ethical project of *Dutch* as formulating an alternative taxonomy of the noteworthy where singularities could coexist in a common space of plurality. A public for *Dutch* was "made" as its members were attuned to a feeling of estrangement and to the anxiety about (one's relation to) normativity that were transposed by the magazine editors onto the characters in the photo stories. *Dutch* created a discursive space where, contrary to the typical fashion magazine, heterosexuality was not presumed, and the collective attachment to the bodies and objects in the stories became a desirable mode of publicness. In the pages of *Dutch*, characters who had normally been unsuitable for fashion representation were now "subjectivized" in the fashion magazine, and the readers joined in the publicness of these subjects not necessarily by way of identification or allegiance, but also by being attentive to them. As Warner highlights, "mere attention" is indeed what is often encouraged in the impersonal address to a queer public (2002: 87), because from attention can ensue all kinds of affects and thoughts that bind readers to their public.

2.7 Toward a Queer Fashion Imaginary

In this chapter I have tracked the passage from a time in which fashion photography reinforced essentialist paradigms while portraying, for instance, glamorous women as empowered agents of change, to a new era in which fashionable ideals were resisted. I have identified 1990s alternative magazines as responsible for the mediation of new styles of fashion modeling and aesthetic atmospheres that turned fashion photography from a relatively static genre reproducing hetero-patriarchal norms to an experimental platform for the proliferation of countercultural outlooks. I have discussed how the realist aesthetic of these alternative magazines was influenced, on the one hand, by documentary photography, due to its crossover into adjacent genres of artistic representation in the 1990s, and on the other, by the adoption of cinematic devices in fashion editorial photography as a result of fashion's increasing fascination with cinema. Absorbing imagery and cultural references from outside fashion, the fashion photography of the 1990s "saw the last great critical mass of young talents to visualize a proper counterargument to current conventions of fashion photography, then a time of big hair, skirt suits, white shirts, and supermodels […]" (Cotton 2016: 46).

Insofar as fashion editorial photography in the 1990s was largely informed by documentary and cinematic modes of representation, narrativity was afforded precedence over the display of clothing, which became incidental, if not absent altogether: the image makers became primarily interested in triggering an affective response in the reader-viewer by way of photographing intimate scenes that had to do with "everything but clothing." As fashion scholar Karen de Perthuis also notes, in the fashion photography at the turn of the millennium, "we find a series of denials that encompass everything commonly associated with the conventional fashion photograph—clothes, beauty, ideals, professionalism, glamour, and even fashion" (2016: 532). Furthermore, fashion photographers began experimenting, like filmmakers, with temporality: by interweaving different temporal layers in their photo stories (as will become more evident in the next chapter), they provoked the viewers' imagination and their creative engagement. Additionally, the fashion models who had been typically hired for photo shoots were now being replaced by often street cast young men and women who took the roles of actors in the narrative development, functioning as conduits of aesthetic feelings within the staged drama of the photographic narrative. I have read this

transformation in the history of fashion photography as a critical meta-commentary on hegemonic fashion cultures, with their adherence to habitual parameters of beauty and their dependence on commerce as a driving force of their communication strategies.

Alternative fashion magazines have an ambivalent relationship with mainstream fashion cultures: by operating at the margins of the industry while not completely renouncing it, they represent a publishing genre that cannot be oversimplified through the label "independent." While these magazines are occasionally endorsed by advertisements, several of their fashion stories parody the fashion industry (as was the case, for instance, with "Homosapiensmodernus"). In 1994, *Dutch* ventured into the editorial market in a critical response to the prevailing fashion iconography of the time: its editors commissioned provocative photo shoots by experimental photographers who were allowed to freely produce images that commented on social issues, and circulated, often in a liberatory way, unprecedented figurations of gender and sexuality. These photo narratives prompted action on the side of the audience: through characters (a term I use deliberately to underscore their narrative role as opposed to commercial fashion models) captured in disidentificatory acts, the reader-viewer was called to reimagine the world on alternative groundings.

Through the analysis of case studies, I will show how fashion images found in this kind of publication unsettled expectations of what fashion images looked like and what they could do. I understand the photo stories examined in this dissertation as repositories of queer feelings that altered the traditional mode of spectatorship of fashion photographs, which operates through aspirational identifications with and/or desire for the models and their clothing. The case studies will show bodies in the act of performing styles of being in the world that evade social legibility; these styles of embodiment ultimately reconfigured fashion photography as an inventory of countercultural gestures and amoral spectatorial positionings. By means of the disidentifications that these photo stories sought to enable, the fashion image might be seen as a site for the creation of alternative possibilities of inhabiting the world, or, adopting Berlant's terminology (inspired by Ernst Bloch), as a "space of concrete utopian imagining" (1994: 125). The affective orchestration of such alternative aesthetics involves magazine counterpublics in the formation of queer senses of the world. I refer to the sense of the world that unfolds in these photo stories as queer because, as the case studies will illustrate, such stories eschew stable signification as they open up the possibility for thinking the world differently.

In their affective relationship with our bodies, fashion images come to *matter* in the sense that they can both touch us and lead us to apprehend how they exemplify ways of embodying social and political non-conformity. Accordingly, my dissertation argues that fashion images are political: not in the sense that they directly intervene in politics, but that, following Rancière, aesthetic affect participates in the distribution of the sensible and therefore has an impact on the social fabric. The case studies will show how subjectivities that had been typically sanitized or regulated in fashion representation were instead given expression in the alternative fashion photography at the turn of the twenty-first century. The gestures circulated in the pages of *Dutch* trouble the historical regime of fashion in its delimitation of which bodies must be visualized and which feelings should be conveyed.

This kind of fashion photography cultivates a language of queerness by way of staging modes of (non-)relationality that are at odds with the kind of representations we would normally come across in fashion magazines. Photo stories and, more broadly, the magazine in which they are printed and via which they are disseminated to the public, produce visual discourses that both resonate with and shape their publics. This is not to say that *Dutch* was only consumed by queer publics, but rather, that it promoted orientations to the world that can be considered queer in that they collide with the fantasies (e.g., of beauty, masculinity/femininity, and happiness) endorsed by the culture of fashion. The readers of *Dutch* could be said to have constituted a public by way of their (individual yet collective) rejection of the fantasies advocated by dominant fashion discourse as well as their sharing in the collective investment in figures of queer non-identity.

The reader-viewer who is not familiar with the magazine may find it difficult to attach a meaning to these photographic narratives and may experience curiosity or frustration: I propose, indeed, that viewing responses of this kind potentially destabilize the patterns of idealization and identification undergirding the consumption of fashion images. Alternative fashion photography, in fact, invites a “slow read” that captures and unhinges the viewers, tutoring them into a viewing practice that can be open, creative, and reflective; in other words, it prompts the reader-viewer to be affectively open and receptive to the world. My suggestion here is that the kind of fashion photo story we encounter in *Dutch* encodes a mode of spectatorship that is removed from the viewing habits, bound as they are to patterns of consumption, that are associated with the practice of reading fashion magazines; instead, it entices the reader to linger: the encounter with the image is conducive to affective

inhabitation and, perhaps, even to an assessment of our ethical and social relationship with the human subjects of which the characters are analogs. Inasmuch as the fashion scenes in *Dutch* encourage a reconsideration of issues pertaining to how we relate to others and the world, they can be used to imagine the world queerly, that is, to envision a world presupposed on an affective dissenting relationship with normativity.

CHAPTER 3

On Queer Neutrality:
Disaffection in "Paradise Lost"

The fashion photo story "Paradise Lost," shot by Steven Klein for *Dutch* in 2002, was inspired by Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky's eponymous documentary film (1996) and its first sequel (2000) which recorded the different stages of the trial of three teenagers accused of the rape, sexual mutilation, and murder of three eight-year-old boys in rural Arkansas in 1993. By stylistically manipulating the references of the docu-film, Klein fabricates an enveloping atmosphere of suspension wherein the models emerge as figures of a structural disattachment from the world. Such a figuration points to an *otherwise* affective, social, and psychic space that enables a queer reading of affect and relationality. In this chapter, intertwining Barthes's notion of the neutral and Lauren Berlant's flat affect, I read what manifests as a sinister scene of youth disaffection in terms of queer neutrality as a means of exploring the performative potential of indeterminate affective states which signal an existential disconnection from the world.

I chose "Paradise Lost" as a case study to highlight the peculiar ability of fashion photography to shape affect worlds that unsettle conventions of moral decorum and "good" feelings. One of the peculiarities of alternative fashion photography is its ability to draw attention to social, political, and cultural events while dislocating, or disorienting, through an aesthetic manipulation, the viewer's possible moral evaluation of these events. Its "philosophy" does not lever on stoking consumers' commodified desires. Instead, it abets a kind of encounter with the image that, in addition to prompting aesthetic appreciation, urges spectators to question the moral expectations that are entrenched in visual representations and are embedded in society at large. This will become clear in my analysis of "Paradise Lost," where the setting and styling of the photo shoot induce an engagement with the narrative that forgoes the moral judgments that would be applicable to the real life events which both the film and the photo story are inspired by.

I am going to explore how "Paradise Lost" depicts characters whose facial expressions, clothing, postures, and location in space contrast with the dreamy imagery promoted by

mainstream fashion. The sordid mood of the photo story is emblematic of the ambivalent affective registers that circulated in alternative publications at the turn of the twenty-first century and contributed to expanding on the limited affective and sexual taxonomies of visual culture.[42] Fashion photography rejected the unattainable and normative imagery of perfection harnessed by capitalism and consumerist culture, and embraced a gloomy aesthetic of numbness and anomie that troubled the borders of morality and sociality. The photo shoot, by visually enacting an aesthetic of neutral affective states that was proper to fashion photography in the late 1990s adds to the archives of ambivalent feelings which queer affect studies have set out to excavate in order to disclose aesthetic and social life configurations that have been traditionally neglected or relegated to the margins. In order to extend my investigation beyond the pragmatic aesthetic work of staging disaffection into its potential embodiment in real life, I tackle the subjects in the pictures as characters—i.e. as "fictional analogues of human agents" (Smith 1995: 17)—hence prompting a hermeneutic venture with the images. By bestowing the characters with agency, and therefore construing them, mimetically, as allegorical figures of actual human beings, I use the fashion images as an entryway into ethical inquiries on queer neutrality.

3.1 Embodying Disaffection

The film *Paradise Lost: Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills* (1996) was followed by two sequels: *Paradise Lost 2: Revelations* (2000) and *Paradise Lost 3: Purgatory* (2011). These were all directed by Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky and produced by HBO. In chronicling the arrest and trial of the teenagers, the first film seemed to seize upon the general agreement that the "West Memphis Three" (as the teenagers accused of murdering three little boys in rural Arkansas came to be known) were indeed responsible for the crime: it showed how they navigated the first trial, at the end of which one was sentenced to death and the other two

[42] "Paradise Lost" also anticipated stances of youth disaffection to come, which are particularly resonant in the light of the current climate of austerity and precarity wherein fantasies of belonging and collective hopes for a better future are largely hindered by the material foreclosure of prospects of self- and collective actualization. It is not a coincidence that youth subcultures and fashion designers alike have revamped grunge styles in the last few years. One glaring example, which also evinces how collectively embodied moods can penetrate and be commodified into culture at large, is the acclaimed Marc Jacobs "Grunge Redux" Resort 2019 collection, which repurposed the grunge designs that got Jacobs dismissed as the head designer of Perry Ellis in 1993.

to life in prison. The first sequel, however, which sparked massive media coverage and interest from the public, and in the wake of which the fashion spread that I am going to examine was shot, took an unexpected path: it followed the unearthing of evidence that could prove the innocence of the three teens and implied that they had been set up by the police as a punishment for their unconventional appearance and taste. Their goth looks and fondness for heavy metal were used as proof of their affiliation with a satanic sect. Suspicion shifted toward John Mark Byers, the adoptive father of one of the victims.[43]

The film trilogy captures the rollercoaster of violent emotions experienced by the families of both the alleged murderers and the victims. The first film shows the deep involvement of the parents of the victims with the local church. However, "I want him to bleed like he made my baby bleed!" yells Byers, who in the documentary incarnates the stereotype of the hillbilly: the same parents who gather in the church for mutual support engage in a sort of reverse disturbing re-enactment of their children's murder by shooting at a pumpkin, which allegorizes the body of one of the alleged killers, until the pumpkin is completely disfigured, shattered, and skinned. Their rage, confusion, and desperation are juxtaposed to the indifference of the West Memphis Three. When the three teenagers are interviewed they show no sign of emotional participation; they speak as though they were not participating in their own life events. Their detachment is a form of unaffectedness, or apparent neutralization of affect.

Within the dullness, isolation, and bleakness of the affective and socio-economic landscape of rural Arkansas, the unaffectedness of these three teenagers might be an embodiment of disaffection. Disaffection, that is, from the sense of belonging to a local community bound together by religious rhetoric, from a system of justice which casts them out as weird based on their looks, and overall from a life that does not bear for them any promise. Such unaffectedness discloses a collapse of optimism and the consequent urge for a reconfiguration of the subject as detached from the political, signaling both dissatisfaction with society and the silent resolution of not being part of it. Their disinterest in emotional participation in life reflects an existential condition that in its very neutrality encapsulates the discomfort of feeling thrown into the world without sustaining a coherent system of values

[43] The second sequel, which will not be part of my analysis as it was shot in 2011 and therefore, for chronological reasons, could not have had an impact on the fashion story, followed the release from prison of the three men after accepting a plea deal.

to which to conform. This kind of shattered state traversing misery and detachment is well-known to subjects who are structurally and historically subordinated (Berlant 2016). Through this lens, disaffection would fall under the rubric of what Sara Ahmed calls "queer feelings," namely, feelings that develop as a result of being affected by the scripts which such feelings fail to reproduce. Queer feelings, following Ahmed, embrace a sense of discomfort, of unease with the available scripts on living and loving (2004b: 155). Nevertheless, they are generative precisely because in the face of traction, discomfort, and dissent, they can carve out alternative paths of novelty, experimentation, inventiveness, and uncertainty that destabilize the security by which norms are held. In other words, queer feelings open up new futures and histories insofar as they involve different orientations to others.

In this chapter, I decipher disaffection as a peculiarly queer affective state: the nexus of unaffectedness and queerness refers to an experience which is unique to individuals whose marginality to normative living figures as a radical emotional disengagement from life events, i.e., an overall temporary affective suspension that does not find sustenance in sociality. I am attuned to an understanding of unaffectedness as, to use Heideggerian terms, an *existential*, a kind of *being-in* which is marked by reluctance, omittance, disavowal, disinvolvement: a "being toward" the world in which *care* is reduced to a bare minimum, that is, a dwelling in the world which does not dovetail with the feeling of "being together with" it (Heidegger 2010 [1927]: § 12, 53-59). I redeploy disaffection in terms of Roland Barthes's neutrality and therefore think of its relation to queerness as a way to attend to the performative potential of affect in reconfiguring styles of being together that clash with rhetorical protocols of emotional legibility.

The neutral—an affect of seeming detachment from affection itself and, because of its estrangement from categorization and clear positionality, a rather queer affect—became the main object of Barthes's lectures at the *Collège de France* in 1977-1978. Barthes postulates the neutral as the exceeding from, and therefore the thwarting of, the paradigm ("*tout ce qui déjoue le paradigm*"), which is for him a constitutionally antagonistic ideological structure. He defines the paradigm as the opposition of two virtual elements, one of which is always actualized in discourse (Barthes 2002b: 31). The oppositionality of the paradigm is defied by the category of the neutral, intended as an inflection of suspension, a Skeptic *epochè*: in implying a suspension of judgement, a blockage of assumptions, a relinquishment of the oppressive requirement to stand for or against, the neutral is a format of epistemic

resistance. The paradigm for Barthes is a figure of conflict, it mandates a choice: thus, its defiance through the endorsement of the neutral (i.e. "*la perémption du paradigm*") is an ethical position and an affirmation of disengagement from the politics of sociality that cuts across "*la langue, le discours, le geste, l'acte, le corps etc.*" (32). In this sense, the neutral is transversal and embodied. It signals an "obstinated affect" ("*un affect obstiné*"), a tension toward a "non-choice" ("*non-choix*") or "the elsewhere from [the] choice [demanded by the conflictual nature of the paradigm]" ("*l'ailleurs du choix [du conflit du paradigme]*") (31-33). It is an affective oscillation, a perpetual variation which may assume different forms without, however, being crystallized in the fixity of a structure. To be neutral, a subject "would thus opt for silence, retreat, oscillation and *wou-wei* (non-action), as opposed to a 'committed' one who would always defend a position or transmit a message" (Zhuo 2017: 120).

As a form of disattachment from the binary logic of active/passive, the neutral is situated between the distinction and indistinction ("*la distinction et l'indistinction*"). It is actually the very disruption of the paradigm "*du distinct et de l'indistinct*": in this sense, it is an active form of passivity or, in other words, a mode of disavowal of choice, a lingering in indeterminacy. In light of its constitutive in-betweenness it cannot be definitively situated. For Barthes, "The Neutral is difficult, provocative, scandalous" because "it implies the thought of the indistinct, the temptation of the distinct and the indistinct" (84), which is to say that to take the position of not taking a position, namely standing by the neutral, is to challenge morality and common sense with a gesture of suspension. It eschews belonging and clear definition:[44] "The neutral feeds (as much as possible) on a form that cannot be stated; in conclusion, the Neutral will be that: the unstatable" (84-85).[45] The main ethical principle underlying the embrace of the neutral is "the non-desire to possess" ("*ne pas vouloir saisir*"). The desire to possess, or to grasp ("*vouloir-saisir*") in Barthes is "the far drifting of arrogance" (2002b: 39): it is a conduct of dominion, an impulse of appropriation and an active imposition on life. To this seizing ("*le vouloir-saisir*"), which is also a seizing upon, Barthes prefers "the will to live" ("le *vouloir-vivre*").

[44] Barthes writes (in my translation from the French): "I am tired of being defined, explained [...]: as a subject, I never feel *adjectified*, and it is exactly this sort of anaesthesia of adjectivation that prompts me to postulate the Neutral" (2002b: 89-90).

[45] It is worth noting that the verb "*prédiquer*" (to predicate) comes from the Latin *praedicatum* which indicates not only the part of a syntagm that in containing the verb gives information on the subject, but also something that is declared, proclaimed: Barthes is referring here to the Neutral as that which cannot be stated, deducted, predicated.

Tapping into Barthes's work on the neutral—as well as into Marxism, psychoanalysis, and Slavoj Žižek's reflection on "interpassivity"—Lauren Berlant theorizes emotional flatness as a "register of underperformed emotional style" associated with numbness and deadpan (2015b: 199). This formulation is inscribed within her broader project of a scrutiny of aesthetic modes of embodied relationality and atmospheres as a philosophical strategy to decipher the cultural and the political in present times. In the essay "Structures of *Un*feeling" (2015b), Berlant examines how flattened affect is employed as an aesthetic strategy by film director Gregg Araki in *Mysterious Skin* (2004) to illustrate how relationality can be relinquished as a consequence of trauma: such an emotional suspension underpins for Berlant an aesthetic of affective dissociation and under-performativity (in the story the two protagonists are, in different ways, dissociated from life as a consequence of sexual abuse) that protects the subjects from the suffering that the attachment to life might engender.

States of affective detachment are explored and typified in the independent cinema of the 1990s, especially in the New Queer Cinema movement that provided the aesthetic backdrop to Berlant's exploration of flat affect. Neutrality could thus be situated under the rubric of flat affects, which Berlant formulates in terms of recessive styles of emotional performance (2015b). It was NQC that within 1990s visual culture radically sanctioned the interdependency of emotional disavowal of society and queerness in the wake of AIDS stigmatization. In addition to NQC, "hixploitation" films—a sub-genre of U.S. cinema in the 1970s that concentrated on sexual, gender, and socioeconomic nonconformity and circulated in drive-ins in rural areas of the Midwest and the South (Herring 2014: 98)—could be considered a precursor in the representation of non-normative sexuality, especially among the regional white working class, consistent with the socio-cultural landscape of *Paradise Lost*.

In her ethnography of queer youth in rural America, Mary Gray has studied how teenagers whose identities do not conform to the expectations of rural communities navigate their milieus. In order "to create belonging and visibility in communities where they are not only a distinct minority but also popularly represented as out of place," they have to negotiate their own subjectivity with the dynamics of class, gender, and race embedded in the structures of rural life: they do so primarily by looking at popular media representations "to piece out what counts as 'authentic'" and they "integrate these depictions of 'realness' into rural settings" (Gray 2009: 3-4). This is perhaps what the West Memphis Three did through

music: they imported metal music into their rural context, hence embodying the aesthetic moods and atmospheres of the music genre. Although they were not self-confessedly gay or queer, the labor that went into the production and stylization of their public persona was indeed queer.[46] Their queerness is alluded to on several occasions throughout the documentary by both the families of the victims and the prosecutor with terms such as "weird" and "different," and they are accused of having engaged in "wild homosexual orgies." Speculations on their sexual behavior and their overall oddness is repeatedly associated with their goth attire: the link of sexuality and appearance is cemented to the point that their looks became for the jury a clear signal of sexual perversion, and an "occult expert" was summoned to educate the jury on the aesthetic and social codes of members of Satanic sects ("I've personally observed people wearing black fingernails, having their hair painted black, wearing black t-shirts..."). It is through the very same look used against them by the jury that the three boys marked their aesthetic allegiance to metal music, adopting such self-display as a strategy for their affective self-estrangement from the local community.

Non-normative masculinities like theirs generated a panic, or phobia, in 1990s rural America, alongside the persistent stigmatization of HIV/AIDS. However, whereas such a phobia was tragically to the detriment of queer individuals (notably, Brandon Teena was murdered in rural Nebraska in 1993, seven months after the Memphis killing, and Matthew Shepard died in Wyoming in 1998), the West Memphis case was an instance of queer-looking teenagers being accused of murder. The representation of the queer villain, or homicidal queer, pitted against the heteronormative hero, has a long history in film and popular culture (Russo 1981; Dyer 1993; Smelik 2004; Schildcrout 2014). In the 1990s, as Diana Fuss (1995) observes, the conflation of homosexuality and homicidal violence gained new resonance, mainly as a result of the media attention given to the arrest in Wisconsin of Jeffrey Dahmer, who had murdered seventeen boys and often engaged in rape, necrophilia and cannibalism, and the popularity of Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) in which a transgender character known as "Buffalo Bill" figured as the primary villain.

Theater scholar Jordan Schildcrout (2014) has conducted an extensive investigation of the queer villain. He links the fascination with this character in the arts and popular culture

[46] The term "queer" is used here as articulated by Michael Warner, "in a capacious way [...] in order to suggest how many ways people can find themselves at odds with straight culture" (1999: 38).

to different factors: the historical association of the homosexual and the murderer in medical and legal discourses; the abject and immoral social status attached to both of these figures; the homophobic rhetoric that, especially in the age of the AIDS epidemic, encouraged the association of homosexuality with a deadly lifestyle; and the relevance of tropes of secrecy and revelation in the structuring of narratives about homosexuals. However, according to Schildcrout, the dangerous queer character should be reclaimed in visual and performative representations in view of its ability to enact fantasies of empowerment and resistance contra feelings of shame and stigma conventionally attributed to non-straight characters. Narratives that draw attention to such type of characters, by probing the anxieties and fears that affect queer lives, can in fact illuminate complex emotional, social, and political circumstances. By reclaiming and resignifying a traditionally homophobic archetype, they can redirect the queer villain toward a new horizon of meaning. Transgressive characters speak to spectators' fantasies and fears pertaining to taboos: in particular, queer characters carrying out transgressive behavior may allow the viewers to question the moral expectation of having to prove oneself as good and enfranchised in alignment with sanitizing representations of queer lives.

Although this chapter, and this research project more broadly, is not explicitly preoccupied with offering interpretations of the aesthetic that interrogate the homophobia produced by ideologies and narratives, it nevertheless is predicated on the belief that a queer affective reading of creative practices and narratives (here in the form of fashion photo stories) can offer alternative perspectives on the emotional and social experiences of queer subjects. The analysis of my case study is, hence, an attempt to show how certain affective states can be construed as not strictly negative, but rather, as a creative opening to alternative considerations of embodiment, masculinity, and relationality. As such states are pragmatically materialized in the form of staged aesthetic arrangements by a creative team of producers, they magnetize desires, fantasies, and identifications among the viewers. In this optic, the alleged queer murderers in "Paradise Lost" are aesthetic figures whose psychic and emotional complexity lends itself to inquiries that sideline moralistic injunctions.

3.2 Staging Disaffection

Dutch magazine could be regarded as a manifesto of an alternative aesthetic—one that was influenced by punk and skate subcultures as well as by the New Queer Cinema movement—that rewrote the codes of fashion photography by mixing goth motifs, street style, and couture in unconventional styling assemblages and shooting edgy-looking unknown models in unglamorous settings. By showcasing the experimental work of young photographers, stylists, and set designers, *Dutch* carved out a space for the construction and representation of individuals who were traditionally ignored by mainstream media and contributed to imagining new narratives that undercut hegemonic displays of sexuality and sociality in fashion photography. The fashion spread "Paradise Lost," published in 2002 as the cover story for the last issue of the magazine, titled "Masquerade," must be understood in the context of an editorial project oriented to the transmission of moods that helped shape alternative aesthetics unbound from the representational genres in vogue in fashion publications.

The photo story was shot in the wake of the public mobilization caused by the release of the documentary's first sequel. On the one hand, a support group called "Free the West Memphis Group" was formed by fans, mostly metal aficionados, of the three, supposedly to raise awareness of their innocence; on the other, a Satanic panic spread across the United States, also as a consequence of the shock generated by the photos of the mutilated boys and the grief of their families as these were shown in the film. In an interview from 2014, Panos Yiapanis, the stylist of the fashion story adapted from the film, recalled the inspiration behind the photo shoot:

> "There was this documentary about three teenagers who were accused and sentenced for allegedly murdering three young boys in a Satanic ritual. There was mounting pressure to solve the crime and they just basically set up these three Metallica fans. They brought in a ton of forensic experts and proved that there was no way these three guys actually did this. [They were convicted] based on the way they looked, in Little Rock, Arkansas. The argument was just: "Look at their clothes, they're Satanists." So that was something that really inspired me and I did a shoot with Steven Klein for *Dutch* magazine that was based on it. [...] Jason [Baldwin, one of the accused] emailed me from prison when the shoot came out. Those kinds of things were really important to me. It became this really big thing where Johnny Depp was supporting and Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam released an album to raise funds to exonerate them and two years ago they were released from prison." (Macalister-Smith 2014)

Yiapanis's remarks indicate that the reactions of the general public as well as the people involved in the trial (the families and the jury) as portrayed in the documentary were animated primarily by concerns with masculinity and appearance: these are widely explored in the photo spread under analysis in this chapter as well as, more generally, in fashion stories published in *Dutch* in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

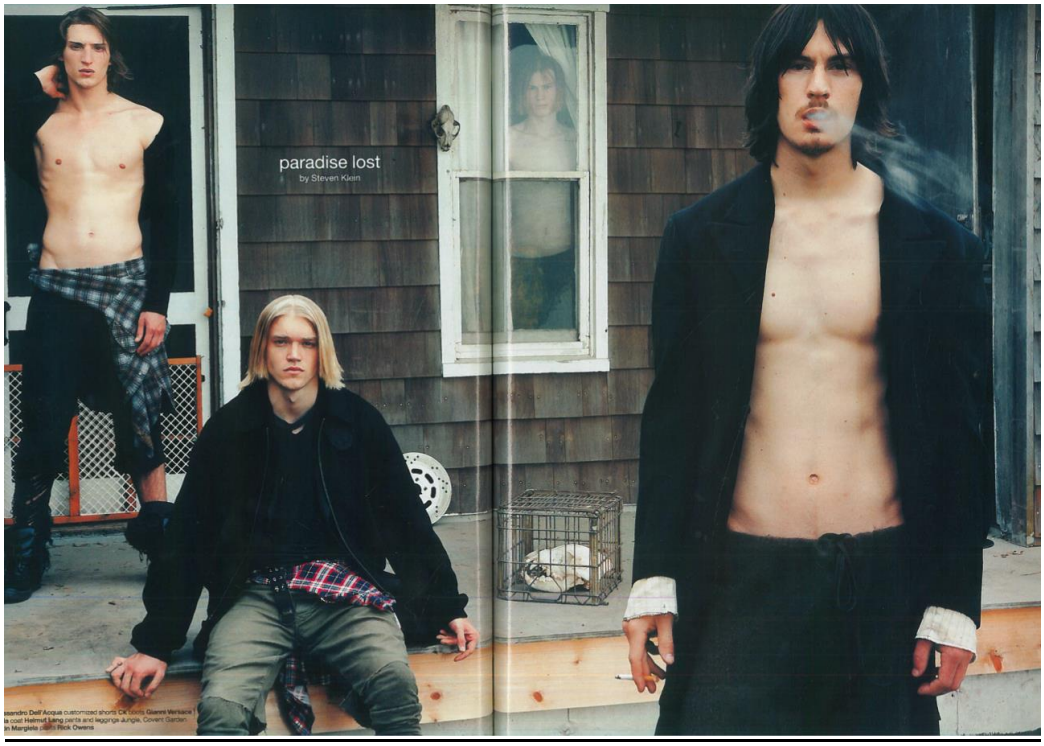


Figure 17. Opening shot of "Paradise Lost," ph. Steven Klein, *Dutch* #40, 2002.

Figure 18. “Paradise Lost,” ph. Steven Klein, *Dutch* #40, 2002.

The photo spread depicts a group of young men wearing black hoodies, metal shirts, lumberjack shirts tied around the waist, and make-up on their face creating distorted masks. Their looks reflect the grunge aesthetic prevalent in the fashion collections of those years and in particular in the designs of Raf Simons, defined in the fashion press as “the arbiter of youth subculture who made rebellious ideas wearable” (Babcock 2017) and credited for fostering an “interzone” overlapping art and fashion wherein “a futuristic, marginal, and otherworldly ideal of masculinity” emerged (Rees-Roberts 2015: 18). The grunge aesthetics originated in the rock music scene in Seattle with bands like Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and Soundgarden; as a style of fashion—characterized by an overall unkempt and unisex look, with plaid shirts, leather boots, and stonewashed jeans as its key items—it began to inform both fashion design and fashion photography in the mid-1990s (Lynge-Jorlén 2017: 28). It is worth noting that the West Memphis Three, as they were filmed in the documentary, had more of a goth look (in particular Damien Echols): “Paradise Lost” is also the name of a gothic metal band that formed at the end of the 1980s and whose first and eponymously titled album pioneered a sub-genre of heavy metal known as “death-doom” (Tracey 2006: 54). The team behind the fashion story recoded goth as grunge, transposing the embodied moods of the metal genre into a style which was then particularly fashionable in cutting-edge indie publications: in

addition to the clothing, we can notice this shift in the models' hairstyles, which clearly evoke Kurt Cobain's.

Figure 19. “Riot Riot Riot,” Raf Simons F/W 1999. Figure 20. “Disorder Incubation Isolation,” F/W 2000.

Raf Simons founded his menswear label in 1995, dressing his models, almost always in black, in skinhead jackets, balaclavas, ripped tops, low-slung pants, asymmetrical suits, body painting, and other stylistic elements inspired by youth subcultures. One of his most successful collections, “Riot Riot Riot” (fig. 19), featuring models in hoods, bombers and scarves covering their faces, was showcased only a few months before the shoot for *Dutch*. This show followed the 1999/2000 fall-winter collection show named “Disorder Incubation Isolation” (fig. 20), a memorial to indie band Joy Division, taken down the catwalk by an army of teenage models wearing black capes and ceremonial costumes, and walking in a robotic manner with a deadpan expression. Simons's designs, imbued with alternative music references that functioned as vectors of resistance to mainstream culture, epitomize the styling leitmotifs of “Paradise Lost.” His aesthetic work is telescoped in the photographic book “Isolated Heroes” (2000): this comprises a series of portraits, shot by David Sims, of teenage “street models” cast by Simons himself and wearing clothes by the designer. The book

alternates color with black and white shots and each photo realistically immortalizes a boy caught up in a fixed gaze: such formal elements are also central in the *Dutch* editorial spread.

Figure 21. “Paradise Lost,” Steven Klein, *Dutch* #40, 2002.

The general setting of the photo shoot is that of an abandoned rural house in the Midwest. In figure 21 a kid stands behind the storm door looking outside at the older boys. Since the child's gaze is directed at the older boys, the picture might suggest that he himself, impersonating one of the victims, seduced the alleged killers. The Batman emblem on his torso looks somewhat disturbing in its semiotic estrangement within the general atmosphere of suspense and overall seriousness. The presence of children also introduces into the scene an element of familiarity that might envision a radical intergenerational form of kinship. This sense of familiarity is reinforced by the setting: a cabin, apparently in the middle of nowhere, which either belongs to them or they have occupied and made their own. This is a setting of familiarity which they have created for themselves, by finding their own “home” with their own “ways”: an environment which they utilized as the context wherein to establish their own form of sociality and orientation to the world.

One of the boys, the leading model in the story (who closely resembles Damien Echols, one of the alleged murderers) wears a “Free the West Memphis Three” t-shirt: he is looking

straight into the camera with an air of fatigue; his expression remains unchanged throughout the story. The two behind him begin sexualizing the space: one is taking off his shirt, while the younger boy from behind seems to be glancing at him. The other one wrapped in a black cape is touching his crotch. Both are looking into the camera: their gestures signal their willingness to engage in sexual activity, however their facial expressions are flattened, illegible. Their disposition to sexuality does not seem to be accompanied by any expressive form of eagerness or excited participation. It is a spatio-temporal fragment, a prelude for something else to happen, and we do not know what that is: it may or may not turn into an event. They seem to be getting ready for it and yet they do not take action. The scene alludes to unpredictable forms of intimacy.

Figure 22. “Paradise Lost,” Steven Klein, *Dutch* #40, 2002.

Figure 23. “Paradise Lost,” Steven Klein, *Dutch* #40, 2002.

Figure 24. “Paradise Lost,” Steven Klein, *Dutch* #40, 2002.

In figure 22, one model whose head is cropped out of the frame is standing with his torso bare. The other three are seated and staring at the camera: they look skeptical, reticent, and overall disaffected. Pictures 23 and 24 make the scene potentially problematic by

introducing a shirtless child seated onto the lap of one of the young men, also shirtless; another bare-chested man stands in the foreground with a singular stuck expression. The couch in the picture is messy, wrecked: the old lining is coming off, the foam rubber is out and torn.[47] The introduction of the child as well as the broken piece of furniture in the set further heighten the atmosphere of suspension: the scene becomes sordid and we are led to believe that these men might actually be responsible for what they have been accused of. In the next image (fig. 24), the model who was holding the child is lying on the couch: he is the only one in the scene. His eyes are barely open and convey nothing, whereas his posture signals weariness, exhaustion. Figure 25 is a close-up version of the main picture of the sequence but here only two of the five boys are placed in front of the camera: they stare at it with a firm unflinching gaze and yet the black masks render their expressions illegible. The rest of their faces is masked by make-up; thus, the focus is on the frozenness of their look.

Figure 25. "Paradise Lost," Steven Klein, *Dutch* #40, 2002.

[47] The broken sofa is a recurring element in the "heroin-chic" realist genre in the fashion photography of the 1990s, which depicted half-naked waifish models looking high on drugs and lying on ripped sofas or dirty carpeted floors.

Figure 26. “Paradise Lost,” Steven Klein, *Dutch* #40, 2002.

While in figure 21 one of the models was wearing a West Memphis Three fan's top, from which we could infer that the creative team behind the shoot meant to stand in support of the innocence of the alleged killers (in line with Yiapanis's statement), pictures 23 and 24 seemed to imply the contrary. And yet, figure 26 contradicts this again. A man, perhaps a bit older, never seen before in the photographic sequence, is standing in the background bare-chested in low-slung work trousers and boots. He is the only one to be shot in full figure in the entire photo spread. In the foreground, blurry, out of focus, and getting closer to the camera, is a zombie-like unidentified figure dressed in a Raf Simons trench coat. We are left wondering whether the man on the porch might be the actual killer.

The photographer releases the story from the narrative bridles of the film, which thematized the violence of and around the event, and instead designs a scene on the threshold of disruptive intimacy, wherein no violence occurs. He is subtly operating on liminality, articulating visual signifiers as well as directing the kinesics and proxemics of the characters so as to play with the viewer's perception of what is going on in the picture and what actually went on in reality, gesturing toward the possibility of an imaginary site of indeterminacy, creativity, and fluidity. The photographic cropping in the sequence, the almost

brutal final close-up, the atmosphere of suspension, and the use of black and white evoke the horror genre: such factors coalesce to generate tension in the viewing experience of the pictures. Particularly in this last shot, the soft focus which blurs the figure in the foreground as well as its cropping contribute to disturb the viewer for an instant with a shocking effect. This blurring is also, perhaps, a reference to Francis Bacon's dark representation of deformed faciality (to which I will briefly return later in this chapter). The appearance of the figure approaching the viewer is in fact unexpected: it is intentionally placed within the montage of the narrative so as to stir the curiosity and creativity of the viewer in the reading of the story.

3.3 Styling Disaffected Masculinities

According to fashion historian Alice Beard, American cinema, particularly in the horror genre, has had a heavy influence on the stylization of violence that has been a leitmotif in fashion photography since the 1970s. She emphasizes that in addition to photographic techniques that act as a "mutilation of the image," the styling of clothing is also crucial in the depiction of violence in fashion photo stories (2002: 33). At a glimpse, here the clothing would not particularly stand out if not for its darkness: the garments are vintage-looking and rather anonymous in the sense that they could have been designed by anyone (if there were no credits captioned at the bottom not even a fashion savvy reader would be able to identify the brands); this is in contrast with mainstream fashion editorials wherein the economic power of the advertisers is proved by the visibility and recognizability of their clothing in the magazine pages. However, black clothing, simultaneously a form of aesthetic distinction and anonymity, acts as a socio-semiotic tool through which the young men situate themselves in a state of ambivalence within a secluded space where sharing and belonging are no longer demanded. Black, in fact, operates here doubly as a mask for feelings and a sign of their unwillingness to engage with society. It is a conduit to the disarming impenetrability of emotional withdrawal.

Disaffection is also embodied in a style of masculinity that tracks the emergence, in the fashion representations at the turn of the century, of a neutralization of gender performances which relied on trite tropes; it is a response to the urgencies of attachment to and identification with the norms of transparent presentation of gender and sexuality. It

marks, in fact, the very refusal of such norms via the manifestation of a generalized disinterest in complying with aesthetic codes. The masculine ideal held up by canonical representations is troubled by an antithetical style of masculinity which heralds experiences of libidinal fluidity that disquiet the self-reassurance that comes with being invested in aesthetic and sexual norms. Such experiences undermine normative ideals by being sexually unidentifiable, unlocatable, and neutral. They dislodge dichotomous visualization and interpretation: morally good or evil, heterosexual or homosexual, mentally stable or unstable. They are placed in transition between teenage and adulthood, masculine and feminine, harmless or dangerous. In other words, disaffection is here a mode of *being in*, or inhabiting, masculinity that contravenes, using Berlant's wording, those genres of sexual identity that function like "structures of conventional expectations" onto which people hold to acquire "certain kinds of affective assurances" (Berlant 2008a: 4).

Dance scholar Brandon Whited has recently discussed the choreographic ability of Steven Klein to stage provocative scenes, often slightly sadistic ones, in which normative conceptions of masculinity are disrupted. Whited highlights that it is the very homoerotic interaction between photographer and model that in Klein's photo shoots orchestrates a visual discourse on masculinity that is generative of alternative styles through which to perform their respective "maleness" (2018: 219). The meticulous construction of intimacy with the models constitutes the creative methodology through which Klein develops visual discourses around masculinity, desire, and pleasure.

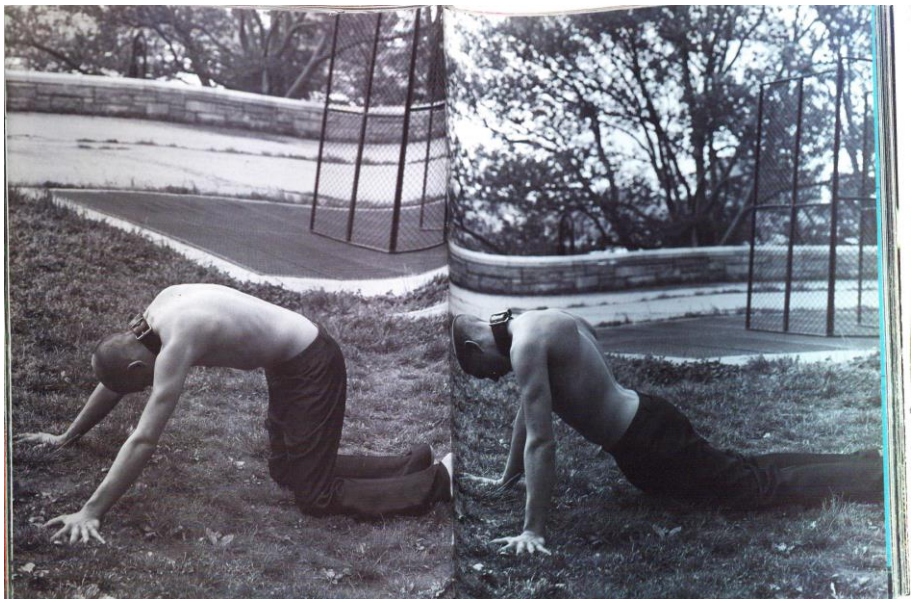
The slim, pale bodies of the models and their haircuts collide with the more conventional imagery of athletic masculinity found both in men's lifestyle magazines and gay titles at the time. Their young and clean-shaven looks evoke a "soft" masculinity (which contradicts the "hardness" associated with murderers) that was typical in the Judeo-Christian tradition and was popularized in 1950s film and literature. As Richard Dyer explains, "The moral worth and erotic beauty of white male flesh always seen at the point of agony" was a Christian import in the context of Romantic poetry, which promoted the association of paleness with femininity. This "typification" of "queer masculinity as white sensitivity" (Dyer 1993: 80) has continued until present and is part of a larger construction of "white identity" profusely reiterated in the fashion imagery of the late 1990s and early 2000s alternative fashion magazines. Such typification is in fact reflected in the minimalist aesthetic that in the late 1990s, in both Europe (with designers such as Hedi Slimane and Raf Simons) and the

United States (especially with Helmut Lang), tightened the link between paleness and vulnerability as an aesthetic counter-norm versus the "hard looks" of the so-called "new man," which had been promoted by the media from the late 1980s (Evans and Gamman 1995: 32; Nixon 1996).

Moreover, it should be pointed out that, as non-mainstream magazines do not prioritize generating profits, they have the freedom not to abide strictly by the aesthetic conventions that guide the marketing logics of mainstream publications. This photo spread, stylistically attuned to the experimental fashion collections of the early 2000s, fosters a conception of beauty that is closer to the mysterious and ambiguous aesthetic of designers like Raf Simons than to the sexy, highly commodified male bodies branded by fashion powerhouses that have dominated the advertising sections of leading fashion publications. The eroticism of this photographic sequence is suffused in the images through allusive and interrupted gestures, nods, and glances (in fig. 21, for instance, the boy with red hair is taking his shirt off and the blonde one is stroking his crotch, both looking mischievously at the camera) which in remaining potentially unfulfilled sustain "the logic of the lure" (Ricco 2002) within the visual narrative. A *débauche sadienne* (it suffices to notice the shirtless kids and the fatigued model slouched on the sofa) is hinted at, and yet no sexual tension seems to circulate among the subjects in the photos insofar as each one is on his own, secluded in his affective disconnection from the world.

The allusion to sexual decadence can be ascribed, following an insight from Richard Dyer, to the iconography of perversion (prevalent in the form of nymphomania, pornography, intergenerational sex, sado-masochism, incest, and transvestitism) which was further developed in film noir, or to the "sick male-male relationships" conventionally associated with queer characters in gay literature and lifestyles (Dyer 1993: 61, 69). As in film noir, the potency attached to male sexuality is not called into question, however "there hovers around it an implication of male uncertainty about sexuality" (69). Taking such elements into account, the queerness of this photo story is somewhat resonant with the aesthetic tropes of film noir, without, however, the underpinning moralistic implications of the latter (as it was traditionally produced within an ideologically heteronormative framework). On the contrary, the negativity of non-normative forms of kinship and erotic interactions is resignified here through an aesthetic lens that shifts the focus to the appeal of glamorized sexual decadence.

Figure 27. “John Robinson,” ph. Steven Klein, *L’Uomo Vogue*, July-August 2003.

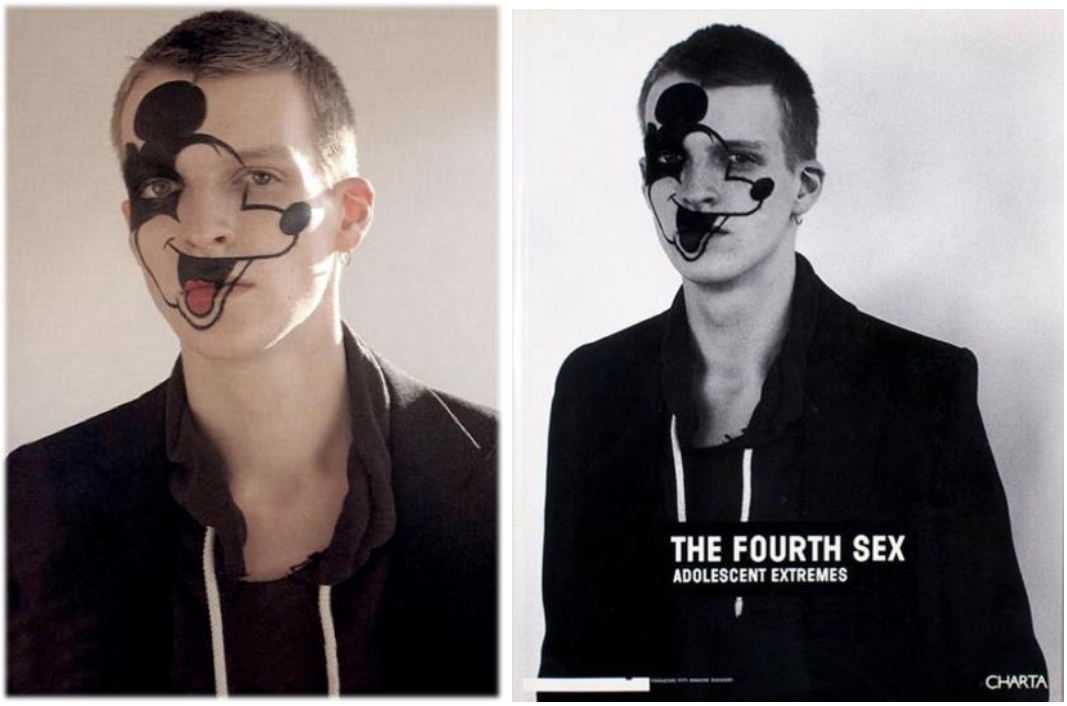


Figures 28-29. “Dark Horse,” ph. Steven Klein, *Dutch* #11, July 1997.

Darkness and sexual decadence are key tropes in Steven Klein's fashion editorial work, which is “marked by transformation, conceptuality, subversiveness, and even a touch of gentle sadism” (“Steven Klein: Biography,” *Business of Fashion*). By way of example, for the July/August 2003 issue of *L'Uomo Vogue*, Klein shot a fashion story inspired by Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003), which was partly based on the 1999 Columbine High School massacre. The photo shoot (fig. 27) took place only a few months after *Dutch* published its final issue featuring “Paradise Lost.” John Robinson (who in *Elephant* played John, the protagonist of the

massacre) is the star of the photo shoot: the character's affectlessness is consistent with the affective mutedness and unavailability that titillates Klein's photographic fantasy. In these images, as well as in others from stories published in *Dutch* (figs. 28 and 29), the elements of S&M and passivity that characterize Klein's visual language are laid out.[48]

The noir undertone of the "Paradise Lost" characters' decadent representation is evidently emphasized in the photographic narrative by the use of black and white, dark clothing, and make-up. Make-up has an obvious yet pivotal role in altering facial expressions and therefore contributing to the transmission of a particular mood. Peter Philips, the make-up artist on the photo shoot, in a conversation about the creative work behind the realization of the story told me that the distorted masks painted on the models' faces in "Paradise Lost" "gave visually a weird twisted mood to the images."[49] Klein's fascination with the distortion or obfuscation of facial traits has been read as a homage to Picasso's cubist dislocations: before turning to fashion photography, in fact, Klein had trained as a painter and his editorial work is largely inspired by both Picasso and Bacon (Whited 2018: 215), two artists who famously experimented with the manipulation of the human face.



[48] The aestheticization of young, slim, white male subjects is a phenomenon common in both contemporary fashion photography and fashion film—and is evident for instance in the work of Hedi Slimane and Gosha Rubchinski, where young boys undergo a cinematic process of transfiguration and commodification (Roberts 2017)—which are at liberty to play with codes of beauty and genres of masculinity and femininity.
[49] My interview with Peter Philips was conducted on 9 January 2018.

Figures 30-31. Model: Robbie Snelders, ph. Willy Vanderperre, make-up by Peter Philips.

Philips, for his part, had also previously experimented with painted masks on photo shoots for Raf Simons: one image in particular, shot by Willy Vanderperre for *V magazine* and depicting a model wearing Raf Simons clothes with a Mickey Mouse painted on his face, became iconic in fashion publishing and was chosen as the cover for "The Fourth Sex: Adolescent Extremes," the catalog of a celebrated exhibition co-curated by Simons in Florence in 2003 (figs. 30-31). Philips was asked by Klein to reproduce that cartoonish mask on the models of "Paradise Lost": he recalled that the photographer wanted to give off an uncanny visual effect by associating alleged killers with a certain playful naïveté, but "because I don't like to repeat, I gave him a Batman on a kid's torso" (fig. 21). Philips goes on to explain:

> "I wanted to add a twisted, almost decadent, touch to the shooting. The whole set-up was kinda trash, and I wanted to add, through a conceptual make-up, a darkness to the story. In contrast to the whole set, the masks added that mysterious touch: the boys became almost anonymous, you can't tell if they're villains or heroes, robbers or *noblesse oblige.*"

Philips's reflective account of the photo shoot suggests the intention among the creative team to translate into images their own ambivalence in regard to the actual events by portraying a scene of aesthetic and moral indeterminacy. The "negotiation of new compromises in morality, where ideas of deviance become fluid as new identities are continually experimented with" (Arnold 1999: 293) was a key operation of the alternative publications at the turn of the century, addressed as they were to a public who felt disengaged from consumerist culture.

The meticulous composition of the scene and the extreme proximity of the camera to the models' bodies create the impression that the photographer, pulling the spectator along, is being drawn to enter the moods in which the characters are steeped. In the shooting of the fashion story the photographer freezes the characters' posed indifference, hence making this the focus of both his and the spectator's attention and interest. The sitting is overall thoroughly arranged: all the pictures are shot frontally and close up so the viewer would linger on the models' facial expressions. By choosing to turn alleged killers, analogically, into the possible object of the desirous gaze of the spectator, the photo story sidelines the normative

moral stance that would be behind a more typical focusing on dramatic feelings associated with a victim's passing. While the crude documentary style of the source (the films) caused astonishment, bewilderment, outrage, in many viewers who were faced with the shocking indifference of the West Memphis Three and the untamable agitation and violence of the victims' families, the photo story deflates such feelings and summons the viewer to engage with the narrative with new eyes and curiosity.

The fashionable stylization of real-life events congeals in forms that permit a sidelining of morality, and favors, instead, the experiencing of affects such as surprise, interest, and curiosity that register as *other* compared with intelligible feelings such as compassion for and empathy with the families of the victims. This is enabled through technical stratagems that trigger our inclination toward what Benjamin referred to as "unconscious optics" (1969 [1935]: 16). Not only does the camera in "Paradise Lost" seem to be inside the scene and to get so close to the models-characters that it gives us the impression that the photographer is part of the "gang," but also, the gaze is reciprocated: the characters are, in the majority of the pictures, staring at the camera in the same way the camera is fixated on them. This mutual gazing becomes a site of both affective and ethical ambivalence. On this matter, film theorist Vivian Sobchack explains that the activity of the camera often adds a physical dimension to what she calls "the inscription of bodily presence": this kind of activity responds to an "interventional gaze" whose involvement in the scene becomes physically engaging in that it virtually encodes in the image its own bodily presence (2004: 184). Klein's ability to make his presence as a photographer corporeally "felt" in the scene, on the one hand intensifies the affectivity of the images, while on the other, draws us closer to the bodies of the models (and, virtually, to the photographer's) hence sparking our own desire for participation.

The photo story does not ultimately determine our stance in regard to the events, but it prompts a disorientation from our extra-textual knowledge of events of this kind, thereby allowing us to experience it with an oblique affective disposition. Along this line of reasoning, "Paradise Lost" recasts a tragic real-life event and mitigates the referential relationship of the images to said event, thereby crystallizing neutral affective states through magnetizing visuals that invite new imaginary ways of lingering affectively with said events. A certain ambivalence is also rendered through clothing. In some pictures (figures 17, 21 and 22) flannel shirts, slouched sweaters, low-waist pants, ripped jeans and tees all point to a certain rawness, germane to the grunge aesthetic dominant in fashion editorial styling in the early 2000s. The

raw quality of the garments, in particular the ripped distressed denim with cuts and fringes, causes the viewer to visualize the tactile sensation of the fabrics—a process of embodied spectatorship that art and media theorist Laura U. Marks has termed "haptic visuality" (2000)—which points to "a particular intimacy [that] seems to subsist between textures and emotions" (Sedgwick 2003: 17).[50] In other pictures (figures 18 and 25), the models are dressed alike with crisp shirts and fitted sweaters: they look formal, polished, sophisticated, in striking contrast with their backdrop. This interplay of clothing styles suggests that, exactly like Raf Simons's muses, they straddle the line between adolescence and adulthood.[51] They find themselves in the impasse between an age where they could rather innocently inhabit a generational disaffection and an age where they are grown-ups and are expected to "own" their affective state.

The use of the black and white, occasionally juxtaposed with color, is a significant aspect to consider in relation to the affective content of the scene. I argue that it might serve a manifold purpose within the aesthetic logic of the fashion story: as film theorist Glyn Davis notes in his exploration of indie cinema, the use of black and white can function as a marker of independence from the dominant system: it "carries connotations of 'artistry'" vis-à-vis the visual style of the commercial mainstream (2011: 31). This aptly describes the creative work of Steven Klein, who has been juggling since the early stages of his career cutting-edge experimental images for independent artsy publications, shot mostly in black and white, with more understated color shots for magazines like *Vogue*. In addition to indexing auteurship, the black and white freezes such images in the past as events that have already occurred. Furthermore, it conjures both the form of the documentary and, more cogently, that of classic horror movies.

Here, the black and white enhances a sense of stillness, fixing the characters as emblematic figures of unaffectedness. As Katherine Wallerstein argues in relation to the black and white "realist" fashion advertisements of the 1990s, "black-and-white photography [...] heightens the sensation of lack, for to use black-and-white in an age when we have color

[50] Dana Seitler explores the haptic relation to an image in terms of "queer sensory experience." Colors and textiles as seen and felt through a photograph can be "textures of personhood [that] forge a visual field of queerness, a field in which queerness is irreducible to gender crossing, identification, or even object choice and opened up to the realm of the senses" (2014: 57-58).

[51] The West Memphis Three were 16, 17, and 18 years old when they were arrested in 1993. By the time their trial was documented they were 19, 20, and 21 in the first documentary and 23, 24, and 25 in the sequel. The models cast for the photo shoot were presumably in their early twenties.

photography is itself a rejection of fullness, of the filling happiness of color. To withhold color is to dwell in a lack, to emphasize starkness, angularity, and hardness over easy, happier softness" (Wallerstein 2015: 146). The juxtaposition of black and white with color images, it is worth noting, is also a device used in crime television, where a scene can be "frozen" in black and white and then the visual narrative moves back to color: in this case the black and white serves to extract an "historical feel" from the narrative. Provided that the color pictures emphasize the verisimilitude of the scene, their contiguity with the pictures in black and white complicates the temporality of the event, interfolding past and present and thereby plays with the spectators' cognitive perception of time, challenging them to guess what, if anything, happened when.

3.4 Ethics and Politics of the Neutral

An overall atmosphere of anesthetized affect pervades the scene. Such an atmosphere is obtained through the aesthetic work of the team of creative professionals behind the production of these photographs: lighting, photographic perspective, composition, clothing, models' facial expressions, poses, gestures, and setting, are tools used by photographer, stylist, and make-up artist to generate an atmosphere that constitutes the affective structure of the photograph. The models' orientation in space is telling: they are proximate to each other, insofar as their bodies are close to one another and their sight is almost always oriented in the same direction, and yet there is no contact among them. They stare at the camera and never look at each other. No feelings appear to circulate across their bodies beyond their tacitly shared implication in unaffectedness. This reveals their estrangement from the world as well as their lack of sociality with each other. They are depicted in a scene of lostness and social neglect that might alludes to the precariousness of life and the bleakness of the durative present. They inhabit a queer space of disaffection wherein relationality is withheld. Such an individuation, materialized in proximity without contact, traces the contours of a situation of emotional disavowal from which they emerge as figures of neutrality.

Their numbed facial expressions contribute to our grasping of what Barthes terms "*l'air de la personne*" (1980: 107), or their aura, which in this case corresponds to their self-exclusion from sociality. In not emoting, they do not rely on the hegemonic strategies for the

commodification of emotions proper to fashion photography. The images, permeated by heightened performative suspension, are thus an ode to affective indeterminacy. Their stuckness, which is thoroughly staged by the photographer, does not epitomize a lack of affect; conversely, it is replete with affect. As Sianne Ngai points out, in fact, "[M]oments of conspicuous inactivity remain affectively charged"; they are affective states in their own right (2005: 14). The photos capture a staged performance of emotional deferral and neutrality: in this *mise-en-scène* of unaffectedness the characters are indeed affected.

They find themselves isolated in a queer space of affective disidentification with the world. Their language is that of mutedness, through which they enact their freedom from the regulative chains of normalcy: they situate themselves outside this regulation, a regulation which is a form of affective control embedded in a rhetoric of legible feelings attending to a normativization of what and how people should feel. Fashion spreads like this unsettle the affective economies of mainstream fashion photography, characterized by standardized looks, poses, and moods. The figures in the pictures disquiet the moral expectations to be intelligible in response to life events, and to the world in general. They embrace and attune us to what Jonathan Flatley, inspired by Heidegger, calls a revolutionary "counter-mood": a shift in mood over which the subject can exert a certain degree of agency and which it can intentionally deploy to activate and express a political stance (2012: 503-504). Their non-transparency, accrued with dark looks, still postures, and numbed facial expressions, generates a panic of inscrutability: in not relating to the outside in ways that can be easily decoded, they figure as emotional outcasts. Such a withheld relationality questions the very rhetoric of involvement and care which is acted upon in societies with the purpose of binding subjects affectively and politically into collectivities.

In his late lectures (1976-1977), Barthes postulates a utopian idea of *vivre-ensemble* as disjointed from the sense of belonging that is integral to active participation in social events: he seems to imagine a society that acknowledges the endless multiplicity of marginalities without the implication of forming a sense of collectivity. In this light, Barthes's idea of "living together" and its focus on affectivity resembles the version of inoperative community elaborated by Jean-Luc Nancy. Barthes's (queer) utopia of heterogeneity is rooted in a core principle of individuation that counteracts, for instance, more recent formulations of queer public assemblies (Butler 2015) and queer assemblages and corporealities (Puar 2005). Barthes's theory of living together thus stems from his unwillingness to partake in

political discourses and argues for the deferral of the political for the sake of the affective freedom of the subject: “the self as imaginative, the indestructible coalescence of affect and its consciousness” (2002b: 138). Within this ethical framework, Barthes's formulation of the neutral grapples with the issue “of how to protect oneself from the regimes of meaning and sociality prevalent in one's society” (O'Meara 2012: 98) which render the idea of collectivity untenable. For Barthes, the neutral avows a resistance to the ideology inherent in any active/passive and positive/negative self-positioning and attitude toward socio-political events and is predicated upon the detachment of the singular from the community.

In one of his late lectures in Paris, Barthes uses the metaphor of nuance in color to describe the neutral as “what changes subtly in appearance, perhaps in meaning, according to the inclination of the subject's gaze” (2002a: 83). As a moment of “*indifférentiation*,” of *pas encore* (not yet), the neutral is thus a potentiality that can be actualized based on the orientation of the subject. The idea of orientation recurs in Barthes's reflections on ethics in *How to Live Together* [*Comment vivre ensemble*] (2002a), where, as literary theorist Patrick Ffrench notes, he fantasizes “a life of proximity to others, but distinct from the couple. [...] It is a question of a relative solitude that maintains a proximity to others, according to a principle of ‘délicatesse.’” Moreover, “living together with others is dealt with not in terms of democratic consensus, but in terms of relations of proximity – the closeness or distance of the bond with the other and with others” (Ffrench: 117). It would be worth unpacking Barthes's reflection on ethics to pave the way into a discussion on the possibility of queer affective community. However, for the scope of this chapter, Barthes's “will to live” (“*vouloir-vivre*”) has served to provide an ethical framework for the concept of the neutral. The neutral coincides, in fact, with a desire to live independently from the will to get, to have, to own: “the Neutral which is not absence, not the refusal of desire, but the potential floating of desire out of the will to possess” (Barthes 2002b: 41).

A sense of inadequacy to the world detaches the characters of the photo story from the continuity of normative life. In this disconnection, neutrality is a form of affect-laden resistance to active/passive participation in the world. Their unaffectedness figuratively mobilizes the body toward the evading of the linear temporality that structures social life. They live outside, or estranged from, a dogmatic bourgeois idea of future hypostatized by “the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction” (Halberstam 2005: 1). Such a refusal to participate emotionally in the world by adhering to neutrality might therefore index

a retreat from the world in its prescriptive tuning of what and how one should feel. This sense of estrangement and out-of-placeness is a slippage from the norms that shape bodies and lives, i.e. a failure in reproducing those scripts by which queer people are nevertheless always affected.

For both Barthes and Berlant, affective neutrality is a mode of dissociation from living in accordance with the scripts held in place and perpetuated by society. This poetics of dissociation relying on neutrality discloses a condition of otherness that is affirmative insofar as it is performed in creative practices with the purpose of eschewing, and thereby, whether or not intentionally, undermining, the aesthetic codes of normalcy. By interweaving Barthes's neutral with Berlant's unfeeling, disaffection emerges as a form of relinquishment of sociality and an active strategy of passive disengagement from moral and political imperatives. What the late Barthes and Berlant have in common is how in their theoretical investigations affect sheds light on the inevitable imbrication of the aesthetic, the social, and the political. As Patrick Ffrench cogently observes in relation to Barthes's utopia, which could be applied also to Berlant's work, "political questions are thought in terms of the affectivities that they mobilize" (2009: 117).

In my reading, "Paradise Lost" unfolds as a scene wherein disaffection, in the style of neutrality, inflects blurred modes of embodying masculinity and sociality beyond facile rhetorical codifications. I argue that all the elements (e.g. the clothing, the emotionless faces of the models, and the sordid setting) that coalesce in the formation of the overall affective atmosphere of the photo spread act conjointly and "periperformatively" with respect to the norms of representation enmeshed in mainstream visual culture: in its counter-exemplarity, "Paradise Lost" illustrates that the visual language of fashion photography can resist performative interpellation to be absorbed into dominant codes. By shaping an aesthetic space of disidentification with safe and happy feelings, these pictures mobilize the spectator toward the encounter with a range of affects that "look" and "feel" queer.

In the affective structure of the photograph, the atmosphere of suspension and detachment is also obtained through silence. Based on the characters' kinesics (their gestures and body postures) and proxemics (how they occupy the space, in this case their distance from one another), the viewer is able to tell that they are not interacting with each other. As I have previously argued, they are physically present and yet their presentness cannot be equated with participation in the matter of the world. I suggest that their lack of interaction

translates cross-modally into a depiction of silence, that is, it enacts a shift from one sense modality (vision) to another (sound). Silence is here sensorially pervasive: we feel it by means of seeing it.[52] The fact that pictures can work affectively by cross-modally suggesting non-visual phenomena contributes to the richness of our affective encounter with the images: photographs can hint at perceptual aspects that are shaped through looking and yet cannot be considered to be contained within the field of vision.

It is through our corporeal interaction with the images that we are enveloped in them: Nancy's idea of *methexis* (unpacked in Chapter 1) refers to the viewers' possible attunement to the intensities and tonalities of the image. The methectic force of the image lies in its capacity to instantiate a new "sense" of the world by means of which the eventful encounter of the viewer with the image reveals a participatory sensibility emerge. I suggest that the stillness, stuckness, and silence of the images hereby discussed elicit, to use Nancy's formula, our affectability: the image, thus constructed, in "touching" us exposes us toward an alternative mode of making sense of the world. It is through the affective and imaginative participation in the world disclosed by the image that we can come to consider the ethical implications of the proposed affective scenario. We can use the images, through the affective enfolding in the world-sense that they offer, as scaffolds for a meditation on the ethical consequences of the neutral.

Silence, in the photo story under examination, serves to freeze the affective arrangement: it increments its stillness and thereby enhances in the viewer a sensation of suspense and tension. Silence may be used by the characters in the story as a tool for absenting themselves from language in its damaging capacity to comprehend, identify, and possibly regulate behavior and identity: that is, as the ultimate act of defiance of the injunctive normalization that operates through interpellation. The image maker, in his felt yet virtual presence within the scene, seems to pander to this act of non-sociability. The characters, to use an idiom recently resurfaced in queer theoretical debates, ultimately "opt out" through silence: this opting out is "a means of uttering the defiant *No!*" (Ruti 2017: 216). They exonerate themselves from discursively succumbing to sociality: silence is, thus, a

[52] Philosopher Kendall Walton has unpacked the real/fictional nature of this experience. He writes, "It is probably not fictional that we *see* sounds or smells or heat when we see the picture, nor is our looking at the picture fictionally a looking at such non-visual phenomena. [...] Is it fictional that we *hear* sounds or *smell* smells or *feel* heat when we look at the picture? Possibly. But it is most unlikely that we are to imagine of our own perception of the picture, of our *looking* at it, that *it* is an instance of smelling or hearing or feeling" (1990: 332).

gesture of negation against being present in dialogue. As a queer gesture, it brings to light the tension between the regulation of bodies operated by social infrastructures and the performative enactment of subjectivity. Critical theorist Mari Ruti synthesizes this succinctly when she writes, “Silence functions as a sign of the subject's refusal to enact the rituals of sovereignty, thereby pointing to alternative modes of dwelling in the world” (2017: 219). The characters in the photos look silent, distant: in a nutshell, unavailable. Their unavailability stirs a fantasy of self-sustained detachment from the ordinariness of the world. They are portrayed as persisting in a state of neutrality which cannot be fully unraveled and translated into language. The reader is, thus, confronted with a representation of non-relationality and anti-sociality. Although such *un*-relationality can hardly be considered as a viable pragmatic mode of being in the world, it nevertheless figures a fantasy of flourishing in the secrecy of silence, clear from the normalizing power of language.

The odd, dark charm of the models and the refined photographic technique in this photo shoot make even a world of deprivation and apathy look worthy of being, at least temporarily, inhabited. While the looks of the models-characters in “Paradise Lost” are edgy according to paradigms of masculinity in men's style magazines, they are also handsome and groomed to perfection. This bears witness to a broader paradoxical ability of fashion image-making: to render enticing styles of being in the world which, extrapolated from the magazine context, could be considered unappealing. Insomuch as the grunge looks of the bodies in “Paradise Lost” are not particularly oppositional or anti-normative per se, what I have been drawing attention to is the affective mediality of these bodies, that is, how they are directed by the photographer and how they are mobilized as carriers of queer moods and feelings to stage a scene of erotic suspension and proximity without contact that impacts the viewer's affective and moral position. In other words, their bodies are endowed with the capacity to modulate affective registers in the reader-viewer. They are not offered as mere commodities, but rather as affective media for the ethico-political project of confronting the reader with neutral modes of being together. Their affective malleability is an invaluable means through which the images may disclose the bodies' potentiality for alternative possibilities of embodiment or critical thinking.

Not only by way of the characters' physical attractiveness and their aspirational grunge “anti-fashion” attire, but also and more importantly through the neutral affective register of the narrative which is circulated through moods and atmospheres as these are

magnetized in an aesthetic-affective arrangement, do their lives become desirable. The characters, as I have illustrated earlier, stare at the camera, which is so extendedly absorbed in the scene as to be readable as complicit with the characters' way of being in the world. They aesthetically embrace disaffection and enact it as a queer gesture of longing for otherness from the artificial positivity of normative affect. This is not simply to say that their negativity disturbs a rhetoric of happiness, but rather, that the negativity inherent to their neutrality (in that the neutral *negates* what Barthes refers to as the "paradigm") may be weaponized for an alternative refiguration of social life. In this sense, the viewer is interpellated to partake of a world where poor social conditions and lack of sociality are reversed into a fruitful opportunity to unmoor oneself from society's imperatives and be cast away from ordinariness, that is, from the burdensome set of demands that "normal living" comports. A scene of youth disaffection in the rural Midwest could thus be turned into a promise of exceptional singularity and freedom from the affective and social systematization of life effected by our urban-centric and neoliberal societies. Viewed from this perspective, what these fashion pictures may hint at is indeed a regained paradise lost.

3.5 Notes on the consequences of the neutral

In her essay on Araki's film, Berlant interprets the absence of affective participation in sex of one of the two main characters, who starts prostituting himself after being a victim of sexual abuse, as a traumatic symptom, which he handles by repeatedly uttering "whatever!" (2015b: 206). Italian queer theorist Marco Pustianaz discusses how "whateverness," seemingly indexing apathy and resignation, is actually a manifestation of passivity that instead of being unpromising and self-destructive can be reversed into an "expansive and alluring resistance to 'mattering'": in this sense, "whateverness is contagious, it is world-making" (2018). Pustianaz looks at whateverness "as a mode of temporary detachment, politically suspended and in search for any subsequently 'proper' attachment": in other words, he sees it as a constitutively dynamic transition into new creative ways of finding a sense of belonging. What our analyses share is the idea that the apparent sidelining of the political is essential to the potential productivity of neutrality or whateverness. Further, whereas disaffection figures (at least in my reading of this photo story) as a detachment from the political, it could

nevertheless be recast, in terms of queer neutrality, as an ungrounding of politics toward its restoration.

Neutrality, signaling disaffection, expresses disidentification with a regime of emotional intelligibility, namely with the institutions of politics and mainstream media that iterate the production of narratives of positive or negative ("good" or "bad") feelings. Disaffection in "Paradise Lost," both in the fashion spread and the film, takes the shape of a promise of non-relationality, or, phrased differently, it disquiets the moral expectations of engagement with the social: it neutralizes the urge of being an active participant in the matter of the world. Neutrality, thus, indexes the queer ambivalence of happening to be in the world while neither wanting to be implicated in the consequences that the being-in-the-world comports nor wanting to be expelled from it: in other terms, to be physically present without feeling attuned to it.[53] The investigation of affective neutrality in this chapter could be a point of departure for interrogating what it means to participate in life without feeling in tune with its ethical and moral demands. Could neutrality be reconceived as an affirmative mode of disengagement from the political without necessarily implying a disavowal of sociality? Could unaffectedness be an affective way of resisting the pressure of partaking in the ethico-political project of community formation? Could the disaffection with the political actually inspire new deployments of queerness striving for a Barthesian ethics of living together that reconciles the individual with a sense of collectivity regardless of one's socio-political dis/identifications? Finally, could neutrality be generative in establishing a new collective sense of queerness that while refuting political belonging does not get stuck in a narcissistic negativity?

[53] I think this is somewhat resonant with an ambivalent practice of being in the world that Berlant calls "living in ellipsis" (2016).

CHAPTER 4

"White Trash":
Unruly Bodies in the Visual Economy of the Fashion Image

In the previous case study, disaffection manifested itself as indifference toward the matter of the world as a consequence of the affective and political foreclosing of a horizon of participation in normative life. The case study in this chapter, instead, calls attention to an "excess of affect" through the exposure of a sensual strategy of collective survival that compensates for the sense of being bound to a life framed by socio-economic bareness. In this chapter, I unpack the white trash aesthetic, fabricated within popular culture and disseminated specifically by fashion photography, through a historical reconstruction that seeks to provide an understanding of the vernacular category of *white trash*. Subsequently, I conduct an analysis of a photo story shot by Alexei Hay and Justine Parsons for *Dutch* in 2000 and broach the question of what the pictures might do by provoking gestural forms of visibility and sociality that are usually relegated to the margins by the sanitizing morality that hovers over non-normative bodies, as well as over their representations, in the dominant culture.[54]

In their canonical work on the politics and poetics of transgression, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White illustrate that the social imperative to reject or debase the "low" coincides with the desire for its otherness: this internal conflict (or neurosis) captures the apparently oxymoronic nexus of power and desire which constructs the ideological formation of the low-Other. Julia Kristeva defined this precise "interspace between abjection and fascination" in terms of "affective ambivalence" (1982: 204). While the low-Other is excluded as a social being on the level of (socio-)political organization, it is also symbolically instrumental for the composition of the collective imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture (the "Imaginary") (Stallybrass 1986: 5-6). Manners constitute an important site where the physical and the social, the ideological and the subjective, interlink: the symbolic configuration of the body in

[54] My case study focuses on American white trash since the photo story was shot by American photographers in the United States. Although *Dutch* was a magazine published in The Netherlands, it operated globally (as I have shown in Chapter 2) by appointing freelance photographers and stylists working worldwide, hence its overall aesthetic is a miscellany of both European and American styles and influences. For the sake of consistency, for what specifically concerns white trash this chapter relies predominantly on American literature on the subject.

the socius occurs through modes of physical self-regulation which inscribe the historical processual formation of the self and are often enacted automatically (Elias [1939] 1978). Bodily images and forms of bodily comportment are performed and materialized differently according to class (Bourdieu 1984): class, gender and other identities are indeed produced and reproduced on a visceral and corporeal level.

With this set of premises in mind, white trash can be considered an embodied style of an at times humorous aesthetic debasement which exposes the abject that the individual who has assimilated tactics of affective management and comportment—in other words, middle- and upper-class self-surveillance—socially rejects. The negation of one's potential self-identification with a "style" that feels menacing for one's sense of self does not foreclose the possibility of corporeal appreciation, for one's affective negative disturbance might also generate erotic pleasure. White trash operates at the threshold of visibility and invisibility, generating a libidinal "lure" that has to do with the imbrication of morality and sexuality: by exposing what middle class "good taste" rejects, it also brings to the surface the very repressive mechanisms that prevent the subject from a free engagement with the constitutive perversity of its desire. As I will explain, white trash has to do with the intermingling of class, race, and sexuality, and its manifestation has the capacity to unsettle one's identity, intended here as a phantasmatic system of self-identifications and projections. If aesthetic manifestations of white trash are affective events that potentially disquiet one's embodied subjectivity, then white trash can be a fruitful aesthetic category by virtue of the possible psychic questioning of our subjectivity that it activates.

Literary critic Katherine Henninger raises the issue that photographs of "white trash" have functioned historically as postmodern "facades" or "simulacra" for the shaping of a fictional national image of the American South (2007: 180-181). Visual images of "white trash" communities would, from this perspective, rigidify a pre-existing power imbalance between marginalized groups and locales and the wider culture, ultimately putting a culture of white poverty on display for the middle-class. On this point she argues that the consumption of images of "white trash" by urban white viewers establishes a "public, symbolic access to ... white trash [bodies]" (136). Taking this into account, I am aware that the discussion of representations of an ostracized social group in the context of fashion imagery might lead the way to reading the photo shoot in this chapter as a mere spectacularization that ultimately produces nothing but the reinforcement of the magazine reader's self-positioning. However,

I develop the argument that in the context of a publication like *Dutch* the trafficking with minor, vernacular aesthetics such as white trash held the aesthetico-political potential of interrogating and expanding the taxonomies of bodies, styles, and feelings that were, and still are, normative in visual, especially fashion, cultures. By reading the affective embodiment of postures, gestures, and looks of the photographic subjects through Giorgio Agamben's theories of gesture and profanation, I will elucidate the capacity of white trash figurations for disturbing the normative scripts of mainstream fashion and for interrogating the liberal affective economy of fashion modeling. In so doing, I suggest that rather than merely aestheticizing a "white trash" community for the pleasure of the reader, Hay and Parsons's unglamorous photo spread sets in motion a different dynamic wherein the subjects concurrently swerve from the ethically problematic coding identified by Henninger and provocatively use their bodies in ways that redefine the communication with the photographer and the viewer.

In addition to showing how white trash functions affectively, aesthetically, and politically within the context of fashion editorial photography, in other words how it operates *within* and *through* the images, I also aim to discuss how *with* and *beyond* the images the viewers could be mobilized toward an ethical reconsideration of the politics of relationality. I submit that the *Dutch* photo shoot proposes an oppositional politics against socially accepted ways of being and acting in the world. More precisely, the aesthetic construction of white trash in the photo spread turns the spectacle of its seductive "otherness" into an arresting staging of alternative self-representation and subversive politics. Thus, I explore the affective and political contribution of a white trash aesthetic to the disorganization of both the conventions of representation within the genre of fashion editorial photography and to practices of spectatorial engagement. This twofold aim presupposes a strategic mimetic conflation of fiction and reality (i.e., the subjects in the pictures are studied, as in the previous chapter, doubly, as models within the production of the photo spread and as analogous human agents who exemplify possible "others" in real life), which could be synthesized in Giorgio Agamben's idea of a "point of indifference" (paraphrasable, I suggest, as a zone of convergence, or collapse, of life and fiction).[55] Ultimately, I seek to unfold the disruptive

[55] The "point of indifference" is, in Agamben's philosophy, "a space where one will be unable to choose between one jurisdiction and another, between the world of art and the world of life" (Formis 2008: 188). I will illustrate, later in this chapter, that for Agamben gestures are those acts that incite an aesthetic experience wherein life

potential of trash gesturality in relation to the general affective economy of "aspirational normativity" (Berlant 2007c: 301) that typically sustains collective attachments to "the fantasy life" promised by the culture of capitalism (Berlant: 278).

4.1 White Trash: History and Popular Culture

The origins of white trash have been traced back to the fifteenth-, sixteenth-, and seventeenth- century association, among the English bourgeoisie, of poverty with laziness, immorality, danger, and lasciviousness. However, the actual fabrication of their identities, with different names across the centuries such as "squatters," "crackers," "tackies," "hillbillies," "rednecks," "white niggers," "white trash" and "trailer trash" occurred, according to historians, later on in the eighteenth-century, when, especially in the British colonies of Virginia and North Carolina, the "lazy lubber," excluded from land ownership, became "a picaresque curiosity, an ethnological oddity" (Wray 2006: 135).[56] "Lubbers" lived geographically outside the lands that fell under judicial and administrative powers and economically survived by squatting, grouping with other marginalized groups such as runaway slaves and native Americans. Because of their survival strategies they were viewed as symbolic threats to the social order.

As such survival strategies began including raiding and thieving, which were causing trouble to local authorities, the threat represented by the "lubbers" became also a political one and the image of the colonial poor white evolved into a figure of violence and treachery known as the "cracker" (Wray: 136). As the repressive apparatus of the colonial government was set in place to face the threat posed by crackers, "poor white trash" turned from a regional odd stigmatype to a national concern in the context of the debate about their assimilation within the social body. In the antebellum period white trash was often the subject of public debates and the label "white trash" was indeed attached to poor white people living at the margins to verbally stigmatize their meagre living conditions. The "trashy" nature of

and art are no longer separate worlds.

[56] The first official occurrence of the designation "white trash" goes back to 1821, however it was not until 1845, when the *New York Herald* reporting on Andrew Jackson's funeral procession in Washington D.C. described the crowd that was trying to get a glimpse of the dead president as "poor white trash," that the term gained popularity (Isenberg 2016: 135).

poor white people in the South was attributed either to their social and economic exclusion or to genetic heredity (since the late-nineteenth century, in fact, eugenicists had argued that the depravity of "white trash" people was caused by hereditary impurities stemming from incest, racial, and class miscegenation) (Wray: 137). Anti-poor white trash campaigners were successful in triggering a process of stigmatization that, albeit constantly shifting due to transformations in class structures, racial taxonomies, gender relations, political economy and medical knowledge, has persisted until the present.

In the 1950s the cult of the country boy Elvis Presley shook the image, until then stigmatized, of poor white folks by revitalizing it through an aspirational narrative of the American dream. No longer rural outcasts, working-class "white trash" men could become successful, glamorous, and ascend the social ladder to the point of being publicly promoted by the nation (Presley was notoriously photographed standing next to President Richard Nixon at the White House) (Isenberg 2016; Sweeney 1997). The figure of the poor rural white was indeed largely popularized through cinema and television. Scott Herring has studied how, in the 1970s, the genre of "hillbilly exploitation" (or "hixploitation" cinema), by exposing the sexual debauchery and unruliness, which he refers to in terms of queerness, of the rural poor whites, reinforced the stigmatizing social imaginary of the non-urban working class, eventually impacting the consolidation of national political conservatism. "Hick flicks," as these movies were also called, portrayed scenes of unrestrained sex acts occurring outdoors in swamps, forests, and pigsties, often aiming to thrill and shock audiences by staging scenes of exuberant group sex and incest (Herring 2014: 99-100). The main difficulty of writing about white trash, which emerges also from Herring's analysis, is that its non-normativity is, at best, hard to pin down since the rhetorics that punctuate the lives of poor "white trash" subjects, as well as that of the audiences who would attend film screenings in regional drive-ins in the South and the Midwest (often self-identifying as new-right conservatives), are considered historically anti- gay and lesbian, despite the actual partaking of the actors in the movies in same-sex erotic acts that transgressed the moral values of dominant straight society.

Hixploitation cinema was not, of course, the only genre responsible for the circulation of white trash images. Whereas hix movies addressed primarily working-class audiences, more mainstream movies such as, for instance, the adaptation of James Dickie's novel *Deliverance* (1970), directed by John Boorman (1972), provided a stigmatizing portrait of white trash debauchery and ugliness (Isenberg: 270). In the 1970s, John Waters, especially

with the success of *Pink Flamingos* (1972), brought a radical trash aesthetic to the wider public. His was a peculiar kind of "filthy" trash, aimed at unsettling audiences by shattering taboos and exposing, via humor, a poetics of immoral human behaviors. By employing shock as an aesthetic ruse to prompt his audience to rethink their values, Waters understood the potential of using obscenity as a viscerally liberating way of disquieting puritanical worldviews. The voluptuous character actor Divine with her grotesque appearance enacts a disturbing parody of conventional representations of women and femininity, questioning and distorting gender roles and notions of womanhood (Pereira Nunes 2015: 12). Waters notably added a queer layering to the visual economy of trash and sanctioned it as a style of "bad taste" with queer connotations and informed by gay sensibilities on a par with other vernacular categories such as kitsch and camp.

In a different vein, Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey's *Trash* (1970) documented instead the attempt of heroin-addict Joe (played by Joe Dallesandro) and Holly (Holly Woodlawn) to get on welfare by faking Holly's pregnancy in order to sustain their drug scoring. Here, the typical white trash sexual debauchery is replaced by Joe's sexual impotence caused by excessive drug consumption, which completely inhibits his sexual appetite. Joe's attractiveness and the urban context of New York shifted the scripts of white trash representations from rural depravity to urban junk, the latter not bereft of a patina of underground "coolness." Through these different channels, among others, white trash representations proliferated with variations that expanded the spectrum of representational possibilities. By the end of the 1980s, white trash was officially "branded" as an identity with its own identifiable cultural forms (Isenberg: 270). It became a genre with recognizable tropes and conventions, and music and television continued to feed American audiences with commodified images of white trash.

In the 1990s, TV shows such as *Beavis and Butt-head* and *South Park* revamped and further widened the embodied styles and vocabulary of white trash subjects, solidifying it as an ever-evolving genre in popular culture. Historian Allan Bérubé, recounting his upbringing in a New Jersey trailer park, teases out the "pop culture, retro-fifties nostalgia" that in the 1990s resurrected the imagery of trailer park life, recoding it as campy trash style through ironic and parodic books, souvenirs, and advertisements depicting those very stereotypical figures that had been historically identified as unworthy of national belonging (Bérubé 1997: 36-37). Bérubé's account of trash reveals how porous and mobile the aesthetic form of trash

is. In fact, its spectrum of variants has become so multifarious in contemporary popular culture that it is difficult to unravel the matrix of meanings of, and projections into, the trash aesthetic coming from any social and sexual group. Anthropologist John Hartigan notes that in the wake of the surge in usage of the term and representations of "white trash" in popular cultural productions, white trash also began to serve occasionally as a means of self-identification, albeit never dispelling its negative connotations. He connects the phenomenon to the popularity of entertainment figures such as the rapper Eminem and the comedian Roseanne Barr, who embodied, performed, and deliberately claimed the epithet as a form of self-designation (2005: 110-111; 160-162).

Historians have also sketched out the relations between the emergence and evolution of the white trash imaginary and American politics, calling attention to the role that presidential figures have played in either ostracizing or sanitizing the social perception of people living on welfare. Bill Clinton, for instance, who was himself a big fan of Elvis, carried the features of the hillbilly identity and was either praised or condemned by the media and the public for being seen as white trash (Isenberg: 300). It appears evident that to a large extent the forms of white trash are impacted by the political economy and the distribution of wealth across urban and rural geographies. The racial aspect of white trash (that is, its whiteness) is indeed inextricably dependent on class, to the point that scholars of the rural working class have considered whiteness as a social category rather than a racial one (Wray 2006: 139).

White trash has functioned, historically, as a rhetorical identity associated with a category of pollution through which the behavior of white Americans of lower-class status has been evaluated. It is the very identification and policing of those who seem to breach the conventions of social and moral decorum that enables the subsistence of whiteness as the unmarked norm.[57] The comportment of certain (in this case white) individuals, in fact, can disturb ideas and perceptions of sameness/difference and belonging/unbelonging, hence ratifying a host of social anxieties, to the point that said subjects are concomitantly recognized as white yet also expelled from the privileged, hegemonic domain of whiteness: this intra-

[57] Anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966) did foundational work on how concepts of waste and pollution are socially deployed for asserting and maintaining the cultural order: the rhetorical logic through which said order is shielded is that abjected materials need to be excluded and the social boundaries policed in order for the social system to function as a *symbolic* order in which certain modes of identity and relationality are perceived as naturalized conditions.

racial struggle over the legitimacy of belonging is at the core of the rhetoric of white class distinction (Hartigan 2005: 113-114; 59-60). Thus, white trash "is neither just a name nor a distinct social group. Rather, it is a form of objectification," tapping primarily into the socio-cultural anxiety of pollution and contamination, through which white American citizens have identified and debased an economically disadvantaged group of fellow citizens as a threat to the state (Hartigan: 106).

Thus, provided that "white trash" is a label attached to the rural working-class by the white upper classes and only later taken on by "white trash" subjects to define themselves, "white" functions as a racist and classist marker to assert the exclusion of non-urban working-class subjects from the privileged regime of racial invisibility. It operates as a socio-symbolic marker that differentiates one's sovereignty, as a socioeconomically hegemonic subject, from the subaltern condition of poor people whose worth and disposability (trash) is so dramatically visible that it requires an identifiable racial marker (white) to cast out and shame its obscenity. Put differently, as others have persuasively observed:

> The term white trash helps solidify for the middle and upper classes a sense of cultural and intellectual superiority. [...] It's also a racial epithet that marks out certain whites as a breed apart, a dysgenic race unto themselves. [...] White trash becomes a term which names what seems unnamable: a race (white) which is used to code "wealth" is coupled with an insult (trash), which means, in this instance, economic waste. (Wray and Newitz 1997: 1-8)

Whiteness, in fact, as acknowledged especially within the field of critical whiteness studies, is constituted as an invisible norm, the uncontested epicenter from which racial determinations irradiate.[58] The embedded ideological normativity of whiteness enables the white subject to identify others as racially different (and eventually express their racism toward these last) by not interrogating their own whiteness. Although whiteness, in its imbrication with class, is crucial in the ideological construction and affirmation of (white) identity, it is nevertheless overlooked so as not to interrogate its meanings and privileges. Whiteness is, thus, tackled in this chapter in its intermingling with class and sexuality, which will be approached through a phenomenological parsing of the bodies onto which these markers are inscribed.

[58] Whiteness studies, or critical white studies, emerged in the wake of the work of authors like W. E. B. Du Bois, Theodore W. Allen, and Toni Morrison, among others. The key tenet of this field of interdisciplinary inquiry is the socially manufactured nature of whiteness, and its general aim is to critically illuminate the invisible structures that produce white privilege as well as its modes of proliferation across the social field.

Philosopher Étienne Balibar defines "class racism" as "the *new racism* of the bourgeois era": the one which, in the wake of capitalist relations of production created by the industrial revolution, targets the working class as the segment of population both exploited and considered socially and politically menacing by the state. In the instance of class racism, according to Balibar, the procedure of racialization of a social group is condensed in a discourse that phantasmatically interlayers and flattens themes of material poverty, criminality, dirtiness, and sexual promiscuity. Class racism, hence, emerges as "the fusion of a socioeconomic category with an anthropological and moral category" and holds up a racialized group as threatening to the maintenance of the social order and the cultural and economic power of the élites (1988: 209-210). The group that is othered based on class racism, as occurs with the population living on welfare in America, is historically relegated to the geographic margins of the polity, using Balibar's words, and is symbolically deprived of a sense of belonging to the nation-state. Indeed, as historian Nancy Isenberg underscores, "Class has never been about income or financial worth alone. It has been fashioned in physical—and yes, bodily—terms. [...] As transitional spaces, unsettled spaces, they [trailer parks] contain occupants who lack the civic markers of stability, productivity, economic value, and human worth" (2016: 315). This nexus of bodily image and race/class/sexuality will be central in my case study analysis.

4.2 The Aesthetic of White Trash in Fashion Photography

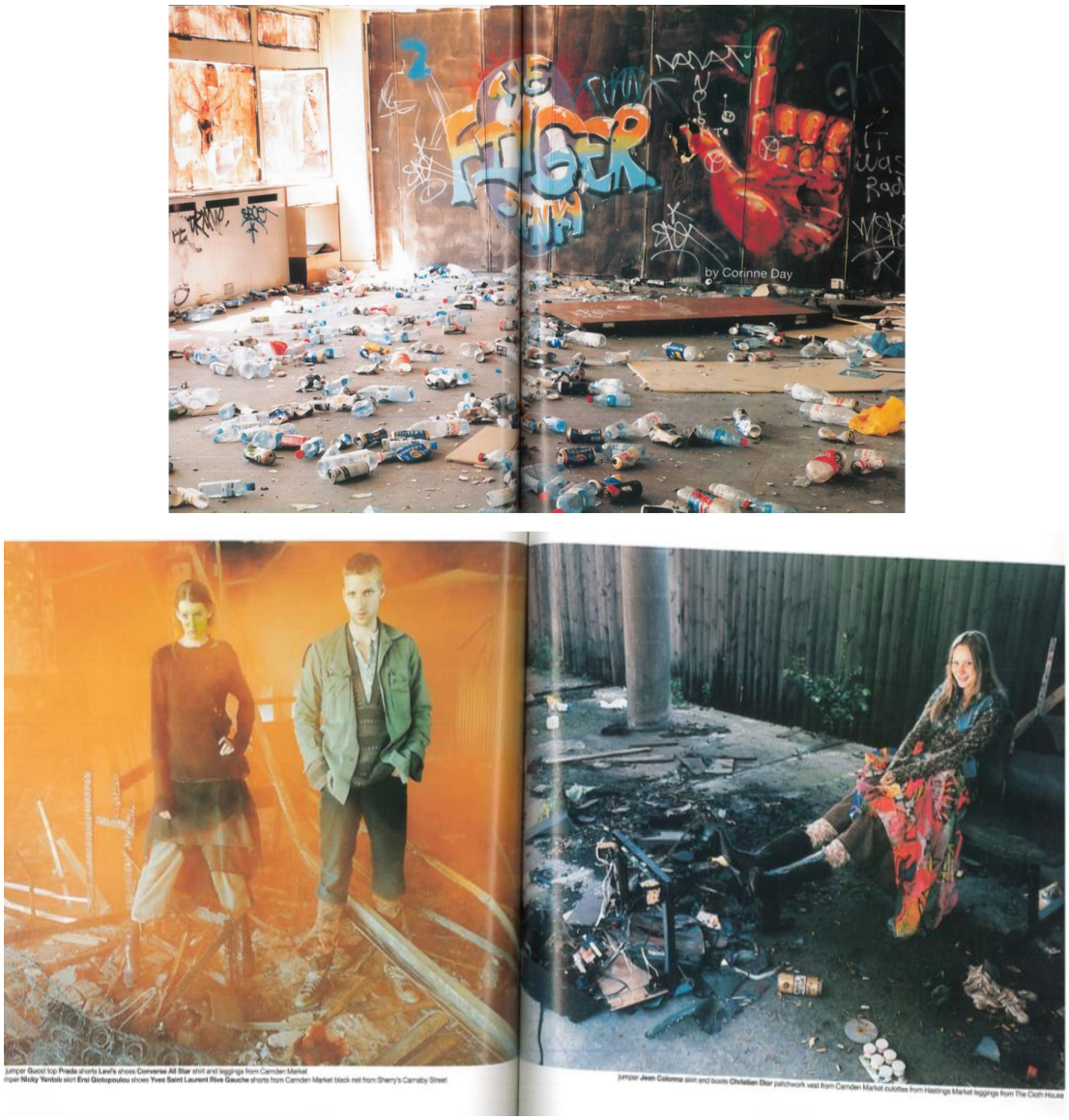
The first instances of appropriation of working-class stylistic tropes by middle-class taste and mainstream fashion hark back to the mid-1980s and represent "an aspect of broader themes in post-punk fashion and design, and post-modern art prevalent in this period of *bricolage* […] and the knowing, disingenuous celebration of camp and kitsch" (Patrick 2004: 232). What started as a practice of ironic resignification of excessive or prosaic elements into designer collections came to create an entire vocabulary that defined the aesthetic identity, as well as the economic fortune, of many high-fashion brands (one could think, for instance, of Versace and Roberto Cavalli's trashy glamour, or Prada's "ugly-chic"). In 1988 cultural critic Margo Jefferson reports for *Vogue* on this trend: "While books, magazines, and TV have been wallowing in the lifestyles of the rich, richer, and famous, a counter-trend has evolved—

downmarket chic. Part nostalgia, part condescension, it's a campy attitude toward trailer parks and diner food, redneck rock and inarticulate heroes."

It was not until the late 1990s, however, that the appropriation of white working-class "excessive" self-fashioning was labeled "white trash" or "trailer trash." In 1993 *New York Times* fashion critic Amy Spindler draws attention to white trash in her essay "Trash Fash," where she observes that the interest in white trash was spreading from cinema (she cites Drew Barrymore in *Guncrazy* [1992], Patricia Arquette in *True Romance* [1993], and Juliette Lewis in *Kalifornia* [1994], among others) to fashion, suggesting that "part of it [this phenomenon] seems to be pop culture's romance with the disenfranchised. The fascination with trailer-park esthetics neatly parallels a trend that has left whites by the side of the road: hip-hop and gangster rap, with their emphasis on impoverished roots and violence" (10). Similarly, feminist scholar Adele Patrick, who has assembled an archive of articles featured in women's magazines that promoted the embracing of white trash styles, identifies music and popular culture (in particular the music videos of Britney Spears and the outfits of Elizabeth Hurley in *Serving Sara* [2002]) from the early 2000s as the main sources of inspiration and diffusion of white trash as a style across the media and street fashions.

A plethora of different stylistic strands could be identified within the domain of white trash. I believe that what Patrick and press articles from the early 2000s refer to is a specific, albeit varied, lineage that can be woven into what fashion scholar Pamela Church Gibson calls "pornostyle" (2014). "Pornostyle" stems from a mainstreaming of white trash excessive styles that in the spectacularizing process of "pornographication" were stitched together with sensual attitudes and clothing items derived from porn films and reality television shows. This kind of "glamorous trash" that proliferated through mainstream media differs from the more "literal" white trash aesthetic of trailer parks that in alternative fashion photography of the late 1990s gradually penetrates into, blends, or overlaps with "heroin-chic" and post-punk "grunge" aesthetics. On the one hand, the label "glam trash" could be used to describe over-stylized sexy looks in which thrift store-looking garments (which are often, actually, designer pieces) are assembled to enhance the contrast of high and low, elegant and vulgar as a form of postmodern fashionability; on the other, a white trash aesthetic in fashion is influenced by the abovementioned sensual and playful embodiment, but is also significantly impacted by the affective atmospheres of impoverishment of which minimalist clothing is a material signifier. As the visual analysis of the case study will evince, in the white trash aesthetic

encountered in alternative magazines, cheap opulence is replaced by exuberant lack. An untitled photo spread shot by Corinne Day in 2001 for issue n. 35 of *Dutch* shows young men and women hanging out in garbage settings like landfill sites, urban tent cities presumably populated by "junkies," or filthy interiors (figs. 32-34).



Figures 32-34. Untitled photo spread, Corinne Day, *Dutch* #35, 2001.

Figure 35. Kristen McMenamy, ph. Juergen Teller, *i-D* magazine, 2003.

A well-known photograph of model Kristen McMenamy shot by Juergen Teller for *i-D* in 2003 (fig. 35) is illustrative of the upfront, careless and unassuming attitudes of naked models smoking, drinking, and just "hanging out" that we encounter in trashy realist pictures from the early 2000s. I take this image as being somewhat emblematic of a transition or an overlapping of a grungy and, styling-wise, "lavish" trash aesthetic (which we can see in Corinne Day's spread) with a crude aesthetic of bold nudity framed in stark, spacious, and uncluttered settings. Fashion scholars have sketched out the mutual influence of fashion photography and pornography, and have highlighted how, in contrast with the highly stylized, sexy, and sophisticated pornographic imagery promoted by Tom Ford's advertising campaigns for Gucci in the 1990s, which were largely indebted to the work of Guy Bourdin and Helmut Newton, photographers like Juergen Teller employed techniques adapted from porn cinematography to create raw scenarios that challenged the hyper-commercial character of those images that were so popular in the 1990s (Church Gibson and Karaminas 2015). It seems relevant here to point out that the imagery that infuses Teller's vision is perhaps that of more "realistic" amateur porn videos and porn zines, as opposed to the polished, tanned, waxed, glam aesthetic fabricated by big porn productions whose visual tropes percolated into fashion advertisements of both high-end (e.g. Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana, and Versace) and lowbrow brands (such as Sisley or Diesel) beginning in the late 1990s.

These considerations are instrumental to introducing my case study, a photo spread shot by Alexei Hay and Justine Parsons for issue n. 30 of *Dutch* in the year 2000. Hay is an American photographer who in the late 1990s shot Garbage's Shirley Manson for the cover of *Spin* magazine, Eminem smoking a bong for *Dazed & Confused* and a group of youngsters from New York's Puerto Rican Day Parade wearing furs for *Dutch*. Alongside his work for arty publications, he also published extensively in titles such as *Harper's Bazaar* and *Elle*, hence straddling the line between underground and mainstream. Vince Aletti has defined Hay's work as "frisky, funny, a little fucked-up," drawing from both photojournalism and Hollywood conventions, and has identified as its main characteristic a certain "ruthlessness" that emerges in the casting of usually young working-class subjects. According to Aletti, Hay photographs outsiders and outlaws not to protect or identify with them but to observe "with flashes of genuine feeling" how their lives and stories play themselves out (2000: 130). In contrast, Parsons is associated with a wave of female artists including Elaine Constantine, Elinor Carucci, Ellen Nolan, and Liz Collins, who, in the late 1990s, began rejecting the conventional looks and unattainable beauty standards typical of fashion magazines and shooting ordinary people in more genuine and less constructed situations and settings (Colman 2000). This group of photographers aimed to create "natural" and unretouched scenarios that questioned the artificiality of those images that had been so popular throughout the 1980s. Around the year 2000, Parsons and Hay partnered on a few experimental photo shoots for magazines such as *Spin*, *Self Service*, and *Dutch*.

Figures 36-38. "Ponnies," ph. Heinz Peter Knes, *Dutch* #36, 2001.

The photo shoot under examination in this chapter comprises twenty-two shots printed over twenty-one pages. Six pictures are printed on a single page next to a blank white page, while the remaining are spread over two pages. Two out of twenty-two pictures showcase objects, while the other twenty depict models. A few small-size pictures are superimposed over much bigger images that extend over the entirety of the page. The superimpositions and gaps in the palimpsest of the photo story are commonly seen in the magazine graphic design from these years. These suggest that the pictures could be potentially further manipulated and reassembled by the reader into new pairings and groupings. As a consequence, there is no linear logic structuring the narrative of the photo spread.

This assemblage practice, which also reflects the process of consumption and resignification of material and visual elements in style subcultures as well as the contamination of aesthetic forms in the constitution of postmodern genres, is recurrent in the photo spreads featured in *Dutch*. By way of example, the spread "The Ponnies" shot by Heinz Peter Knes (a German photographer whose artistic work around issues of gender and sexuality was largely promoted in *Butt* magazine) for *Dutch* in 2001 (figs. 36-38) features a mix and match of model shots, landscape portraits, sketches, close-ups of discarded objects or spaces, and pictures that are often retouched to look as though they belong to different time-periods, in order to create a visual chaos for the reader to work out. Each picture of the shoot I will analyze is a fragment of a possible story, a visual event that, assembled with the others, builds up an affective scenography. In light of, and consistent with, this structural dissonance, I will often jump from one picture to another and I will, at times, conveniently group them together in my descriptions. The photo spread does not have a title; however, as its opening photo foregrounds a sign that reads "Memory," for practicality I will be referring to this photo story as "Memory."

4.3 Gestural Profanations

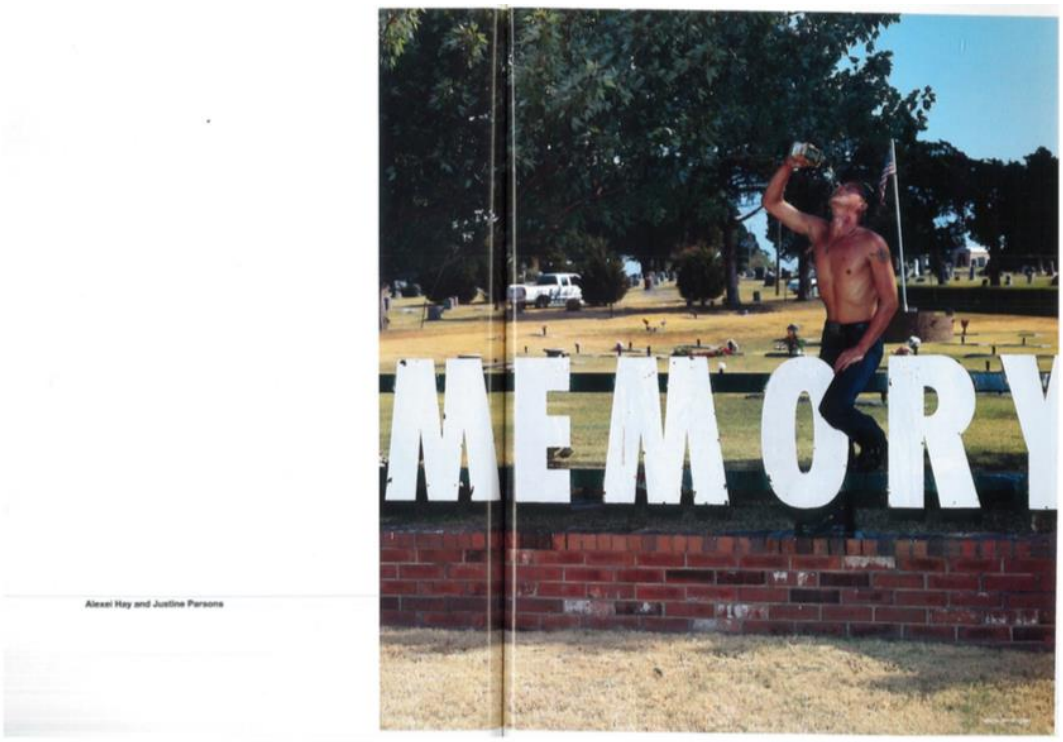


Figure 39. Opening shot of “Memory,” ph. Alexei Hay and Justine Parsons, *Dutch* #30, 2000.

The opening shot of “Memory” (fig. 39) shows a tanned young man pouring scotch out of a bottle over his face. In view of his tan, the sunny weather, and the style of the car in the background it can be inferred that the story was shot in a southern, or perhaps midwestern, state. Mimicking commercial imagery where actors and pin-ups cool off with water bottles, he is performing the same kind of action with a bottle of scotch. He is sitting with legs astride on the welcome sign to the cemetery. Behind his back we can see the tombs and an American flag. This first image introduces us to a theatrics of profanation wherein appropriateness and consideration for the state (the flag) and human death (the tombs) are beyond the photographic subject's concern.

I am going to argue that profanation is what is gesturally enacted through the photographs in this photo story. I will return to the idea of profanation through an analysis of the gestural later in this section. However, as a premise, it is worth mentioning that in Giorgio Agamben's philosophy, from which I am largely drawing in this chapter, profanity is an urgent political task, a modality of resistance against the “unprofanable” and the instigation to separation. A profanation is a way of returning things to the free “use” of the people

(Agamben 2005: 73). It is a "return" in the sense that things, eventually, can get repossessed by the commons after rituals (of the state and religion, for instance) have subtracted them from the "human law"; they go back to their condition before the interruption of contact between people and things, that is, prior to any form of separation.[59] Quoting Agamben, "To profane means to open the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignores separation or, rather, puts it to a particular use" (2005: 75). A profanation, according to the philosopher, can sometimes be effected through play (and it is not a coincidence that parody, which will come up later in the course of this analysis, occupies an important place in Agamben's reflection on literary and artistic profanations) and has the purpose of neutralizing the unavailability of its object, namely, of reinstating the thing into its original space so as to defuse the apparatus of power which had seized hold of that very space.

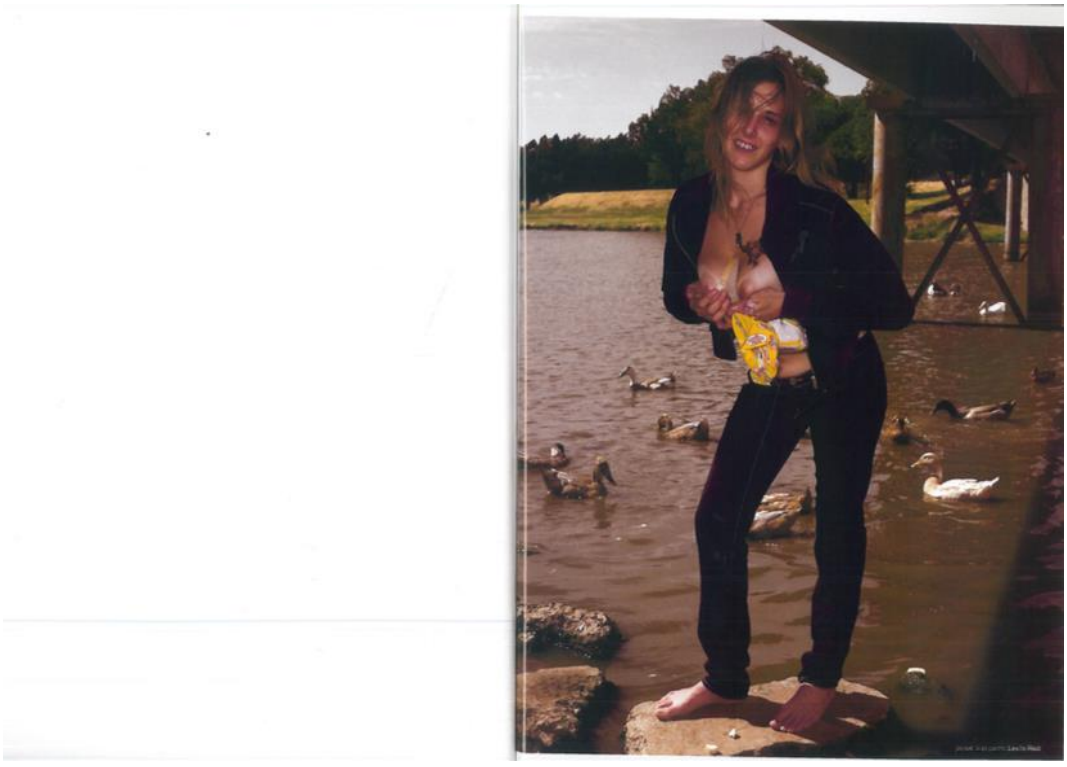


Figure 40. Motorboat, "Memory," ph. Alexei Hay and Justine Parsons, *Dutch* #30.

[59] According to Agamben, the act of forceful separation that extirpates the object from its original use or space is most evidently effected over our bodies, for instance through society's tabooing of bodily functions. In this sense, a return to and embracing of the "naturality" of our bodily functions can easily generate parody. The task, for Agamben, is to collectively invent new modes of use of those very acts and objects of which we have been symbolically deprived.

In the second shot of the sequence (fig. 40), on the right side of a double page, a young woman with her jacket unzipped is exposing her breasts. She is pushing her breasts against each other to squeeze in a slice of bread in the middle. The “motorboat” gesture confronts the viewer with an unexpected ludic performance of kink. Gestures, and here I am referring specifically to profanatory ones, refer, according to Agamben, to the “intersection between life and art, act and power, general and particular, text and execution. [The gesture] is a moment of life subtracted from the context of individual biography as well as a moment of art subtracted from the neutrality of aesthetics: it is pure praxis” (2000: 80). As I will further unpack, the gesture is a pure exhibition of mediality insofar as it is neither a means to an end nor an end in itself; and in making a means visible as such, it pries open for people the sphere of ethos: it “allows the emergence of the being-in-a-medium of human beings and thus it opens the ethical dimension for them” (2000: 58). In the picture, the messy hair, the poorly designed tattoo on her breast, and the use of sliced bread as a sex prop, are all signifiers pointing to a performative exhibition of white trash stereotypical identity. Two key elements of this image contravene the rhetoric of fashionable representability: the model's facial expression and her posture. Within the perfectly balanced composition of the shot, the subject is placed at the center of the frame, in an unglamorous location, provocatively and humorously inviting the camera and/or the viewer to join her for a “titty fuck.” In a full mockery of the rationalizing modernist body performances and mechanical smiles of fashion models (Evans 2013), the model in figure 40 is proudly and jokingly exposing her ruined teeth with her mouth almost fully opened in a laugh that might register either her being self-conscious about her act or her being high. She has dark circles under her eyes and her hair is disheveled.

In a recent essay on awkwardness in fashion photography, Éugenie Shinkle outlines a genealogy of feminine composure in front of the camera, tracking how in modernist fashion photography the models' bodies were affectively coordinated to comply with a sense of control and restraint that was deemed functional to pictorial representation. This disciplined staging exerted by the (usually male) photographer over the (female) model was aimed at containing the body within the legitimate aesthetic, affective, and moral boundaries of the fashion photograph, relying strictly on a studied repertoire of poses, including the “natural” ones, since “excessive affect, or expression that failed to match up with the actions of the body, threatened the picture's meaning” (Shinkle 2017: 206). Photographers like William

Klein in the 1950s allowed the models' bodies a higher degree of freedom beyond the controlling formalities that had typified the fashion photography of the previous decades, hence opening it up to the exhibition of disjointed “graceless” or awkward bodies that stretched the language of posing by incorporating actions such as leaning, bending, rotating, and, more generally, proposing an angularity of the body “that transformed the model into a gawky adolescent or a mechanical doll” (Shinkle: 208). Shinkle, who reads this evolution as a shift in the affective parameters of female subjectivities in fashion photography that enlarged its aesthetic vocabulary, contends that Juergen Teller's photographs from the early 2000s brought this defiance of composure to an extreme.

I am referencing Shinkle's account of the relation between affect and femininity in fashion photography to emphasize that the political potential of affect can emerge through fashion images and can thereby challenge norms of representation. In figure 40 a disturbance is likely generated by the actual gesture of the model who is bluntly enveloping the eyes of the viewer in a visual field wherein the optical focus is on her breasts mimicking a sex act. The model's bodily disobedience is blatant in the photo spread as she seems to have a great deal of agency and to be rather ruthless. There is more than an affective recalibration of models' rhetorical movements. The images play with affective registers of loud exuberance and shamelessness that translate into eruptive piercing visuality: the playful erotic gestures and postures could be considered the forms of the affects in this photo story. The model’s disquieting impact is also achieved through her singularly unglamorous looks. In this sense, this photo shoot constitutes an exception to Caroline Evans's statement that a model is always “both idealised and other” (2003: 75), since here the bodies of the models most likely do not offer themselves to any psychic process of idealization; the body is “other” from the aspirational bodies of fashion models (whether these are slim, extremely skinny, or “curvy”) insofar as in “Memory” the models humorously flaunt the stereotypical signs of the working class tattooed on the surface of their skin.

Figure 41. Close-up of model's body, "Memory," *Dutch* #30.

Cultural critic Laura Kipnis assesses how "improper bodies have political implications, and are particularly valenced in relation to issues of class." By improper bodies, she means bodies "that defy social norms and proprieties of size, smell, dress, manner, or gender conventions; or lack of proper decorum about matters of sex and elimination; or defy bourgeois sensibilities by being too uncontained and indecorous—these bodies seem to pose multiple threats to social and psychic orders [...]" (1997: 114). These kinds of bodies can be employed as instruments of social sedition since, as Kipnis reminds us following Foucault, the body is what any system of power is committed to keeping in its place. The unmannered and out of control bodies of the subjects in these photographs expose an unruliness that mechanisms of psychic repression tend to keep under control. These bodies, exposing their erotic ebullience, constitute a problem or a disturbance in the customs of polite society. As feminist political theorist Cathy J. Cohen sharply observes, sexual deviance from a prescribed moral norm has been used to demonize even segments of the population that fall under the label of heterosexuality, such as the "lazy people" living on welfare (1997: 457).

The unruliness, or excess, of the subjects' bodies can also be a compensatory act for their symbolic and material negative recognition in the outside world. The anxiety of being deemed unworthy or disposable (trash) is managed through prosaic bodily over-performances that cannot be ignored by those who are themselves complicit with capitalist logics of separation, and that leave an affective mark on the ordinariness of places and

others.. This is an opposite strategy of social survival than that which was adopted by the subjects in the previous case study who regressed in a muted and numbed state of disengagement and underperformance. In a libidinal economy that either de-sexualizes excess with the purpose of sanitizing and normalizing it or adamantly ignores it in the attempt to annihilate it, the stereotypical white trash exuberant sexuality is redeployed by these subjects as free-spirited so as to playfully encourage the viewers to confront any possible anxious discomfort over the public, shameless exhibition of working-class erotic bodies.

Lauren Berlant has cast light on how shamelessness operates as a political tactic and has defined it as “the performative act of refusing the foreclosure on action that a shamer tries to induce.” Moreover, it “might also perform freedom [...], the freedom to give up getting legitimacy in normal terms.” She goes on to unpack this idea by explaining that shamelessness might ultimately involve “any frank refusal to produce the affect for you that you need someone to have in order for you to feel in control of the situation of exchange. It is to take control over the making and breaking of the terms in which reciprocity will proceed, if at all.” In this sense, “the affective event of performative shamelessness initiates, therefore, the potential for unraveling normative defenses” (Berlant, Najafi, Serlin 2008). As I will further dissect, “Memory” has the potential to provoke its audience psychosexually, while simultaneously questioning the codes of erotic containability that sustain the cultural logic of mainstream fashion magazines.

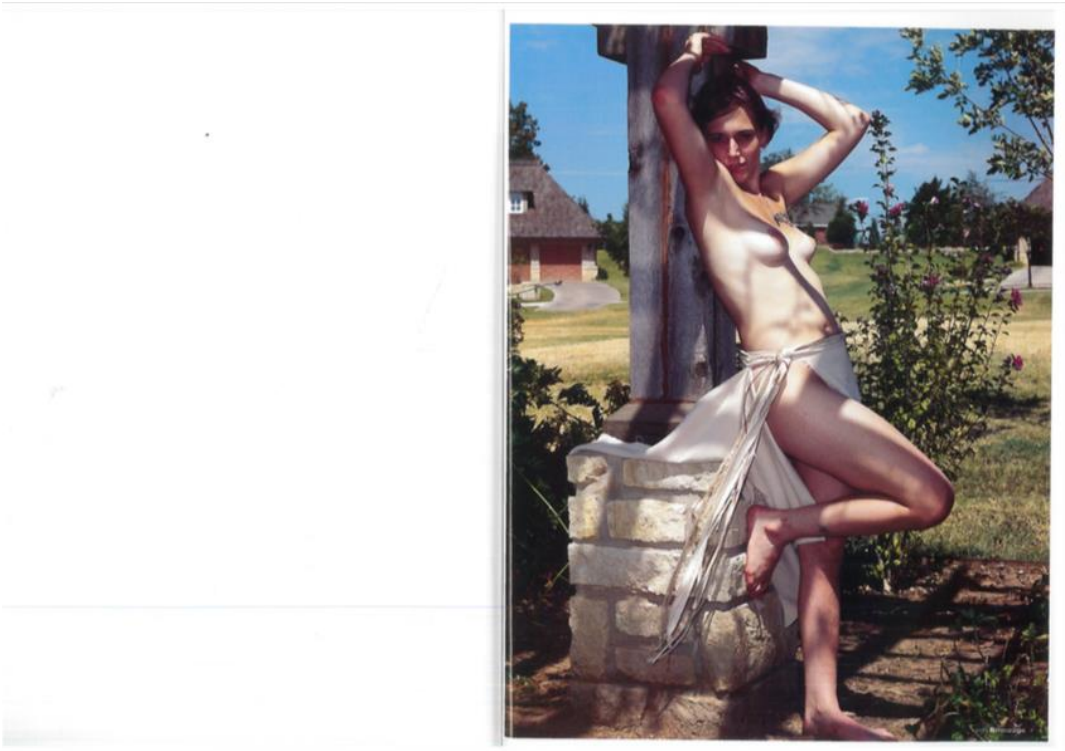


Figure 42. Model leaning on tomb, “Memory,” *Dutch* #30, 2000.

In the shot pictured above (fig. 42), the subject is wearing a chiton-style skirt that, with no undergarment, exposes her bare legs emulating the postures of statues from classical antiquity. With a naughty sneer on her face addressed to the photographers/viewers, her clumsy attitude takes the form of a parodic performative embodiment of how idealized bodies of Greek statues and fashion models alike instill aspirations among the middle class. At the margins of aesthetic inclusion, the models in this shoot stand for a mockery of the hyper-capitalist regime of visibility that via fashion magazines, among other channels, establishes standards of appropriateness and sets paradigms of representability. Here, before the viewer's eyes, there is a straightforward display of what the fashion magazine's consumer normally steers clear of: the “primitive” exhibition of the body, which typically does not encapsulate any viable and desirable attitude for the reader to take on. The dearth of clothing in this photo shoot, and the thrifty look of the few garments that are actually featured, makes this “profanation” of the medium (i.e. the model’s body), which conventionally is “used” to convey highly staged yet legible styles of affective embodiment in conformity with the commercial magazine’s mode of address, even more palpable. Additionally, the model is leaning with her back on what seems to be a cross, erected over a tomb. We are brought back for a moment into the graveyard from the opening shot. From observing a man getting wet

and drunk over the cemetery's welcome sign, we have now moved to witnessing the playful contact between the naked flesh and the tomb.

In this photo story profanation operates doubly. On the one hand, there is a profanation of the consumerist employment of the medium of the magazine as a means toward a commercial end: there are barely any saleable clothes in the pictures and the models are far from being and looking commercially purposeful. On the other hand, the kinesics and proxemics of the subjects in the photos profane the middle-class mannerisms of composure that are ritualistically learned and enacted by professional fashion models in their work in front of the camera. I will return to this point toward the end of this chapter. In addition to restoring a natural state of pre-encumbrance of external power over the body, profanation can also act as a form of play, a "pure means," that is, a praxis that is isolated from its possible relationship with an end. In other words, by deactivating the uses of the body (Agamben uses the Nancean term "inoperative") imposed by the exercise of power the act of profanation can become pure mediality without teleology. This resignification of the medial use of gestures reinscribes the latter into the domain of potentiality, therefore opening it up to new and generative uses.

In closing his reflection on profanation, Agamben resorts to Benjamin's concept of "exhibition-value" (*Ausstellungswert*) to describe the work of fashion models and porn stars (2005: 88-92). He suggests that the bodies of these actors are exhibited as removed from the sphere of use, in the sense that they exhibit themselves, henceforth creating value in the very act of exhibition. Models and porn stars achieve this pervasiveness of exhibition-value, according to Agamben, through the "inexpressive" look on their faces (he speaks of "nullification of expressivity"), which signals nothing beyond itself. I will linger on this point since it seems to me pivotal for a consideration of the affective bodies of the models in the photo shoot under scrutiny in relation to their ethico-political use and mediality. What Agamben is arguing by stating that the model's body is conflated with exhibition-value is that the "brazen-faced indifference" of fashion and porn professionals displays the human face (and, by extension, the body) as a "pure means": it is "bare" because these bodies show themselves as absolute mediality. As I have mentioned at the beginning of this section, pure mediality does not imply an annihilation of possibilities. Quite the contrary: for Agamben the reduction to pure means avails the object of new uses and forms of communication. I find this latter part of the argument, namely the unfurling of novel modes of use of the body, salient

as well as useful in order to envision and conceptualize possibilities of corporeal resignification; this is also the argument with which I am primarily concerned in this chapter, and I will make evident how it could be read in conjunction with queer utopian theories of aesthetic potentiality.

Going back for a moment to Agamben's earlier work, in *The Coming Community* (1990) he had already put in correlation the fashion model and the porn actress in an epigrammatic passage in which he writes that, with the invention of photography and the consequent serial reproduction and distribution of images, "the body now became something truly *whatever*" (47). Here, Agamben is clearly influenced by Debord as he argues that, in the present era, the commodity form has come to regulate social life and that experience has been replaced by "spectacle," which is a social relation that separates human beings from each other and hence alienates sociality itself. Debord maintains that film stars are "spectacular representations of human beings": they are experts in the sensational life of appearances (they are "agents of spectacle") because in acting out a certain lifestyle they offer themselves up to becoming banal and impersonal "objects" (or "types") with which the passive spectator can obediently identify (2014 [1967]: 24). So, when in 1990 Agamben originally refers to the body of the fashion model as a whatever-body, he means that with the spectacular manipulation and commodification of the female body in the epoch of technological reproducibility, the body has lost its specificity and has become pure image, a separate thing from actual physical living bodies. In my opinion, this view is assuaged and redirected toward more sanguine outcomes in Agamben's later work.

In *Profanations* (2005), in fact, as I have mentioned earlier, Agamben engages again in a reflection on the body of the model and the porn star, but this time he does so via Benjamin (whose fragmentary yet important fashion theory has recently shaped Agamben's own meditation on fashion [2009]). In this essay, he quotes film director Ingmar Bergman who in reference to Swedish actress Harriet Andersson's performance in *Summer with Monika* (1952) commented: "There is established a *shameless* and direct contact with the spectator" (2005: 89, my emphasis). Agamben uses this statement to affirm that in commodity society the bodily performance, including the facial expression, of women on screen has become more animated, to the extent that they seem to be playing for the camera with a high degree of awareness of their own spectacle. In performing the awareness of being watched, he writes, fashion models and porn actresses show exhibition itself: exhibition-value, thus, is used by

Agamben as a descriptor of the affectless modality of the model's or actress's self-staging and is taken as emblematic of the spectacle of the human body at the time of advanced capitalism. At this point, however, in a passage that is central to my analysis, Agamben finally takes a step further toward a reconsideration of the potential of what he reads as shameless indifference: precisely because of the models' "impersonality," the exhibition of their body to the eye of the camera opens itself to another use "which concerns not so much the pleasure of the partner as a new collective use of sexuality" (2005: 91). Aside from this brief comment, Agamben does not provide further insights as to the kinds of "uses" of the body that the model/actress might unlock.

I think that when Agamben writes about the indifference of the faces and bodies of the fashion models he is thinking about the exemplarity of their lack of specificity. I conjecture that their unpredictable uses of the body might be thought of, via Agamben, as openings into the ethical sphere of potentiality, intended as that which cannot be reduced to its presentness: potentiality is immanent yet not actual, it can be imagined as unfolding in the horizon, which means that we can understand it only in its constitutive futurity. If we understand the uses of the body as indeterminate and indefinite (but still contingent upon the body's materiality), then the body is "whatever" in the sense in which whatever "is the event of an outside" (1990: 66): it is exteriority that becomes determinate only insofar as it attaches itself to a possible idea (and therefore is always *in relation to* something). It is not the bearer of an identity but the very exposure to being named "in one way or another": to use Agamben's terminology, in its being "such as it is," it is "pure relationship" and in such a relationship it can take on new qualities and properties and thereby make a free use of itself.

In a broader sense, Agamben's critical concept of "whateverness" ("*quodlibetality*") describes a being that is "pure humanity" in its ontological-relational character: in a way, echoing Nancy, it is pure being whose belonging to the human community is not contingent upon any particular condition of belonging. "Whatever" is a figure of multiple singularities that are exposed in the world "as such," unconstrained from the necessity to possess or share an identity: they are in a community, but one in which they are not united by essence, property, or identity. In Agamben's words: their "individuation" coincides with their "indetermination" (1990: 55). With this paradox, Agamben is not suggesting that singularity is radically unknowable, but rather that it "borders all possibility" and therefore (its indetermination) is open to being determined thanks to the relation it may entertain with

particular ideas (or other bodies). According to Agamben, influenced by Debord, in our society of spectacle contemporary politics is an “experimentum linguae” that disarticulates and empties beliefs, ideologies, identities, and communities (2000: 85). In the face of such a nullification of identity, what the state cannot tolerate and yet is unable to eliminate are the “whatever singularities” (“*singolarità qualunque*”) which, having emerged from such a nullification, cannot claim any condition of belonging to social identity (1990: 86).

Thus, the “whatever singularities,” which lack social conditions of belonging and thereby cannot be in-stated (assimilated into the state), constitute a non-state, that is, pure humanity, struggling with the state that casts them out as nonexistent (marking a disjunction, a dramatic split, a separation from these identity-free subjectivities). They are cast out as nonexistent insofar as by not claiming an identitarian presupposition, they are unintelligible to the state, and therefore are judged unassimilable and unrepresentable. The queerness of Agamben's ideas, in my opinion, surfaces in this line of thought. The fact that the state does not recognize what appears to be not assimilable means that it negates the possibility of forming a community for those whatever subjectivities that, bereft of cohesive identity markers, appear to challenge the very idea of identitarian belonging that is inherent in the pursuit of external recognition. According to Agamben, it is exactly these whatever singularities which decline identity markers and presuppositions of belonging that are “the new, nonsubjective, and socially inconsistent protagonist[s] of the coming politics” (2000: 90).

Going back to the fashion models and porn stars referenced by Agamben, the intrinsic mediality of their use of their own bodies may, as a medium without an end, beckon toward new forms of communication and interaction. I would suggest, on the one hand, that the model's body undergoes a process of commodification under the gaze of designers, photographers, magazine readers and thus of the prospective consumers of the goods they promote. On the other hand, however, the face and bodies of the models are far from being static, and furthermore they are not “indifferent,” as Agamben claims (he speaks of their lack of facial expression hyperbolically as “the most absolute indifference, the most stoic ataraxy” [2005: 91]). There are also numerous differences between fashion models and porn stars on the level of their use of the body. The models featured in the commercial advertisements which Agamben has in mind may indeed have a dégagé or carefree expression; however, while I do understand his assertion as pointing to a common lack of individuality, for the purpose of my discussion it would be perfunctory to take as a given that models look “indifferent.”

Moreover, there exist two kinds of fashion models, whose bodily performances are tremendously divergent: fashion editorial models, as I will further investigate in the next section of this chapter, are required to work as film actresses, impersonating a character in order to co-produce a narrative with editors and image professionals on set; in a different manner, commercial models can look "indifferent" or "affectless"——although they most certainly are not, for there is conspicuous affective work behind the performance of affectlessness—to the degree that, as Debord would put it, they need to act as "stars of consumption."[60] I would argue that, as the bodily performance of the models in "Memory" demonstrates, it is exactly the models' capacity to modulate affective registers beyond staged inexpressiveness that renders their mediality so eloquent. They are not impassive, and their bodies are not a *tabula rasa*. Their affective mobility is indeed the most valuable resource of their body's potentiality for otherwiseness; namely, through their affective memory and knowledge they can suggest possibilities of embodiment or critical thinking that are hard to predict or that, in Agamben's terms, may be without an end.

For the Italian philosopher, the porn actress, who in performing her erotic gestures becomes a means addressed to the end of giving pleasure to the spectator, is actually suspended in and by her own mediality, and can thus become the medium of new forms of pleasure and contact in the audience. This can well be applied to the fashion model, reiterating a point made earlier in this chapter: the models' bodies in their gestural performativity can function as affective mediality that disturbs and paves the way for new modes of looking, connecting, and thinking about one's pleasures and desire, as well as those of other bodies. This political gesturality of the body, which in Agamben's thought defines the "communication of a communicability," i.e. "the being-in-language of human beings as pure mediality" (2000: 59), is in sync with queer theorist Juana María Rodríguez's conceptualization of the gesture as an "action that extends beyond itself [...]; an action that signals its desire to act, perhaps to touch. Gestures [...] register the kinetic effort of communication" (2014: 2). The term "effort" here is akin to Agamben's (idea of the) gesture as the support, or endurance, of its very mediality, that is, its capacity to be affected and instantiate communication.

[60] Fashion models often need to move between the performative modes required by the editorial and commercial domains respectively, and their ability to segue between these is evidence of "star", or "top model," potential.

However, whereas for Agamben the pure means of the gesture requires attention in its capacity to disclose the ethical dimension of our being-together, regardless of any determinate goal, some of the theorists committed to a queer of color critique have readdressed gestural politics toward the imagination of utopian forms of sociality that resist homophobia, racism, and moral expectations.[61] As Rodríguez emphasizes, gestures can be affective and political forms of corporeality that, on the one hand, expose the iterative structures and relations of power to which the subject performing the gesture might be historically subjugated, while on the other, contest social demands for racial and gender normalization. This double bind makes the gesture aesthetically, politically, and ethically salient: it serves to instantiate a process of non-verbal relationality that is congruent with the activation of communication. From this standpoint, the mediality of the gesture is not strictly "without ends" insofar as it propels ethical action.

4.4 Affective Labor and the Meaning of Whiteness

An examination of the gestural potentiality of the fashion model's body would benefit from incorporating the insights of other thinkers whose political philosophies fall, along with Agamben's, under the denomination of "Italian radical thought" (Virno and Hardt 2006). Sociologist Elizabeth Wissinger (2007) has taken on this endeavor, arguing that the work routinely undertaken by fashion models can be described in terms of immaterial and affective labor (two notions derived respectively from Maurizio Lazzarato and Antonio Negri). The models' affective work is in line, according to Wissinger, with capitalist productive strategies in ways that are not merely about the sale of commodities: modeling, in fact, is also, and most importantly, about calibrating bodily affects in various forms that are circulated in post-industrial economies. In the immaterial-affective work undertaken in front of the camera, the fashion model creates, together with the team of professionals involved in the production of the shoot, affective networks and intensities: these affective energies are, later on, virtually manipulated in their economic distribution. Wissinger writes:

[61] The ethico-political mediality of the aesthetic gesture, namely, its opening to being-in-common, is reinterpreted by Muñoz (2009) and Rodríguez (2014) within the framework of queer aesthetic praxis, wherein gestures operate as modes of relationality setting the conditions for forms of collectivity to come into being.

> Models work to stimulate interest in and attention to images by playing on forces that can consciously be perceived as desire, envy, or a need to belong (through being fashionable or "in the know"); in so doing, they produce networks for affective flow that create community. They also, however, produce affective images, by tuning into a felt sense of vitality, aliveness, or engagement that takes no particular form, but taps into affective energy that is then conveyed via the virtual human contact of the image. (Wissinger 2007: 260)

Wissinger's account of the affective labor of models is fairly normative since her reflection may apply only, and anyway not conclusively, to commercial fashion models (working primarily for advertisements rather than magazines, although the two may overlap). As this dissertation should have evinced by now, "vitality" and "aliveness" are certainly not the only moods that fashion images attune us to. Nonetheless, I believe that her reflection is useful in order to fill the gap left by Agamben's account of the mediality of the model's body: the potentiality of her type of body resides, beyond its exhibition-value, in what, following Toni Negri, can be called "value-affect" (1999: 79). The immaterial labor of the model's body, using Negri's language, "becomes affect or rather, labor finds its value in affect," which conjures Spinoza's description of being affected as an increase or decrease in the body's vital force.

Thus, the affective capacity of the model's body coincides, I suggest, with a twofold potentiality: it is produced, transferred, circulated and distributed in the form of what Elspeth H. Brown terms "commercialized affect" (2012: 37; 2017: 289), a formula indicating that the body is socially articulated through collective forms of affective labor embedded in the consumer economy; but also, it can open to the unexpected by being dynamic and creative: challenging the boundaries that keep the body composed and decorous and upending those very same visual rhetorics that instrumentalize bodies in order to produce and disseminate "commercialized feelings." Such an affective capacity of the model's body entrusts it with more agency and reveals affect as potentially transformational. Negri writes that affect is "an expansive power … a power of freedom, ontological opening, and omnilateral diffusion." Such power of incommensurability and uncontainability lies in the fact that "affects construct a commonality among subjects" inasmuch as they express a commonality of desire that may be collective, expansive, and possibly universal (1999: 85). Negri remarks that political economy seeks to regulate and control the expansivity of affect, or to manage it through

commercialized registers, but affect can always bind communities and consequently move them toward action and transformation.

The white trash bodies in the photo spread stand for this expressivity that resists containment. Quoting José Muñoz, who is inspired by Althusser's philosophy of the encounter to imagine a punk theory of the commons, I would suggest that models' bodies are enacting "the social choreography of a potentially insurrectionist mode of being in the world" (2013c: 97). In a space abandoned by capital, the subjects mock the very affective labor carried out by commercial models subjugated by, or complicit with, the regime of productivity. They are doing so by using humor in a scene of abandonment. They exceed the dialectic of activity/passivity or productivity/non-productivity by being overly active in unproductive activities; that is, by overperforming a use of the body that leads to no productive end. They use their bodies queerly in an affective excess of aesthetic boundaries of moral representability, namely, in defiance of the neoliberal expectations placed on bodies to perform in productive and constructive ways.

What should also be emphasized in the context of this case study is the specific whiteness of these models' "trash bodies." Gesturing, in fact, as performance studies scholars have explored, confronts social demands of normativity that have to do in equal measure with gender, sexuality, and race (Noland 2008: x). Obscene or excessive gestures signal the body's refusal to be domesticated by socially built moral codes, which are even more vehemently repressive when they are attached to non-normative bodies. The peculiarity in the instance of white trash bodies is that they look *simply* white, and therefore not "uncommon" or "aberrant"; however, they are socioeconomically chastised as eccentric, or worse, as waste. The flaunted sluttiness and tackiness of the markedly white trash body could be read in this photo story as an affective instrument of disidentification with (the racial invisibility of) the dominant body of the upper classes. In other words, the whiteness of the models' bodies functions as an intensifying marker of a working-class aesthetic that disquiets the body politic, socially as well as erotically, through exhibitionism.

Richard Dyer points out how, in the visual arts, whiteness is usually visualized and recognized *qua* whiteness only when white bodies are juxtaposed with non-white bodies (1997: 13). In this photo spread, however, whiteness is all-pervasive and its very spectacle renders it the conceptual and visual focus of the representation. More precisely, the characters' whiteness is not the same as the alabaster and goth incarnation of the subjects in

the previous chapter, which emphasized their neutral and ambivalent ethical standing in life. By contrast, here the bodies are tanned and sweaty: they carry the markers of the working class. That is to say, their whiteness is made visible through class signifiers. Whiteness, in its assumed invisibility and universality, paradoxically longs for a metaphysical detachment from corporeality: in Dyer's words, to some degree it aspires to "*dis*-embodiedness" (this aspiration to transcendence is most likely owed to the cultural impact of Christianity on ideas of the body) (Dyer: 39). The immateriality, or disembodiment, of whiteness is counteracted in this photo spread by a precisely antithetical excess of corporeality. The unboundedness of these bodies is rendered through an unredeemable cheapness of looks that resists the sanitized representations of bodies and their reification as covetable luxury goods in mainstream culture.

Figures of white trash are in fact designated as white because they are often "monstrously" so (Newitz 1997: 134), and they cannot be reduced to aspirational marketable images with commercial value. The idiom of monstrosity is hyperbolic; however, it is the very untamable visibility of the poverty of looks and taste that accounts for the racialization of the working-class "trash" subject. The bodies in these images might interpellate white viewers to confront how the disavowal of one's own whiteness occurs by displacing it onto others who they deem subaltern: a process of inversed displacement, or "displaced abjection" (Stallybrass 1986: 53). In this sense, white trash bodies prompt privileged white subjects to become self-conscious about the affectively unregistered invisibility of their race, and they do so by exposing the "horror" of whiteness, namely the trash that bourgeois morality rejects. Indeed, abjection, according to Kristeva, "is a composite of judgement and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives" (1982: 10). Laura Kipnis writes apropos of *Hustler* magazine—which, as I will show shortly, had an impact, along with other pornographic publications, on how white trash is staged in this photo story—that it suggests a non-normative sexuality by way of exhibiting vulgar, un-romanticized and embarrassing white bodies governed by eruptive vitality in defiance of the strictures of bourgeois mores (1993: 223). This well applies to the bodies featured in "Memory," which are animated by a festive and foolish vitality as well as by a humorous attitude that violates the "parasexual" conventions underpinning the aesthetic of fashion magazines.

Figures 43-44. Naked model, "Memory," *Dutch* #30.

From the tanned bodies encountered in the previous shots, in the double-page spread pictured above (figs. 43-44) there is a shift to a luminous, translucent, soft, marble-like surface, which nevertheless does not contain its excess. The visceral abrasiveness of these white trash bodies is also enhanced through the lighting. On this point Dyer argues that lighting is an aesthetic technology that has been used in cinema to construct images of white people; in other words, technological modes of representation have been historically implicated in the ideology of whiteness (1997: 82-84). In my case study, Hay and Parsons are shooting in natural light, at times resorting to bare flash for harsh, direct, extra lighting on the sweat and tan of the bodies. The photographic technique, overall, is intentionally unpolished, unsophisticated, and carefully reduced to basics. They are not employing lighting as a tool for coding aspirational femininities or masculinities; instead, their technique is consistent with, and formally pivotal for, the bare "authenticity" of white trash as it frames everyday scenes of working-class youth life. In figures 43 and 44, sweating, with just a grungy plaid shirt on her shoulders, the model is uncorking a sparkling wine bottle, conjuring up the embodied anti-sociality typical of hard-drinking and hard-smoking music icons such as Courtney Love and her 1990s rock band Hole. The full nudity and the exposure of genitalia is indebted to the

boisterous attitude of “all-girl zines that are all about hot sweaty all-clits-out girl power” (Kipnis 1997: 129-130).

The eroticism exuded in the pictures above is indeed reminiscent of the feminist riot girl aesthetic of trash that one could encounter in girl rock music zines. It is also influenced by an aesthetic of amateur porn that provides a stage for white trash looks and tastes. On the entanglement of a trash aesthetic and porn visuality, feminist film scholar Constance Penley construes trash as a genre that manifests itself “as a form of populist cultural criticism” whose operationality is germane to pornography, which has historically challenged political, religious, and moral authorities (1997: 92). The raunchiness, the ostensibly stupid humor, the sluttiness—all elements that Penley encompasses under the rubric of “bawdiness,” which taps into the aesthetic and erotic of the “stag film” (Waugh 1996)—are properties of the in-your-face confrontationality against codes of decorum that porn zines share with white trash. Penley explains that in the 1990s pornography became particularly trashy as producers abandoned their concerns with quality in order to meet the demands of the rapidly expanding VCR market (1997: 101). As a result, amateur porn filmmaking, also circulating on the web, distributed at a strikingly high speed white trashy aesthetics and sensibilities which were embraced through varied redeployments within popular culture.

Figures 45-46. “Karen 4 eva,” ph. Alexey Hay, *Dutch* #37, 2002.

Figure 47. Model showing her breast, "Memory," *Dutch* #30.

Fashion photography is one of the fields of visual culture that was most evidently informed by uses of the body derived from pornography. The style of postures that we encounter in the photo spread under examination appears to be influenced by amateur porn photography as much as by "cheesecake pin-ups" from the 1950s. In particular, the quirky eroticism of Bettie Page is often referenced in the work of Alexei Hay. Black and white images of model Karen Elson shot by Hay for *Dutch* in 2002 (figs. 45-46) evidently recall the postures and attitude of the pin-ups (in this case even the bangs are a literal reference to Page). The lively sensuality of the glamorous erotic photography from the 1950s is, however, reframed by Hay and Parsons in a trashy realist aesthetic, in which the models of our photo spread are also immersed (the case study analyzed in this chapter was shot in the year 2000, two years before the shooting with Elson took place). In figure 47 the model's style of bodily performance is congruent with that in figure 40 (the second shot in the photo spread) and similar to the more explicit pin-up aesthetic with which Hay would experiment two years later. The model is exposing her breast while leaning back in a pose that, as the platform shoes conventionally worn by strippers or porn stars suggest, we could easily come across in a porn magazine. The humorous faces, clumsiness, and uninhibited self-presentations of the models in "Memory" appear indeed to owe more to amateur pornography and the campy

obscenity of the stag film than to traditional fashion photography, wherein even happy and lighthearted feelings have to be embodied and then staged seriously and professionally by the model.

4.5 Juvenile Masculinities

Figure 48. Vagface, "Memory," *Dutch* #30.

There are three male models in the photo spread, and their bodies appear over eight pages, interspersing the images of the female models, in what look like polaroid snapshots. In figure 48, right after and almost in response to the female model engaged in her erotic gag with the bread, a boy, maybe younger than her, is simulating with his hands the act of male-to-female oral sex, making what is also known as a "vagface." He is sticking his head through the branches of a plant, perhaps peeking at his female counterpart from the previous. The look on his face is tired, or high, and yet, like the woman in the immediately preceding shot, his face shows a naughty expression that is telegraphing the "kinky" affective atmosphere collectively inhabited by the subjects in the spread.

In Freud's joke-analysis, the "obscene joke" is understood as "bawdry": an act of "stripping naked" the person (according to Freud, always of the opposite sex) at whom the joke is directed. A form of aggression that is an end in itself, it does not literally turn into material aggression but "lingers on the evocation of arousal and derives pleasure from signs of it in the woman" ([1905] 2002: 96). What makes the bawdy joke readable as such is the

presence of the interlocutor in the performance of the joke: the listener/viewer is the audience who is expected to experience, together with the joker, the sexual pleasure presumed in the "joke-work" in an onanistic act. The pleasure derived from this joke, in Freud's rather nebulous account, has to do with its being undisguised: the technique used by obscene jokers of the lower class is, for Freud, its figural explicitness (whereas more cultivated people would use wit and allusion as the main joking techniques). The joke, in its implied "obscenity," would provide a means of reversing the psychical process of repression. In other words, in the scene of the joke the sexual aggression of the (male) joker toward the (female) object of the joke is repressed and replaced with words/signs: the sexual energy is deflected, or sublimated, and converted into hysterical laughter. The libido of the audience is then satisfied by imagining the female body that is exposed through speech or signs by the joker.[62]

In the photo shoot, considering the montage of the spread, the "vagface" is the sign of a fantasized sexuality in relation to the female models in the photographic sequence. It may also function to release anxiety and boredom in a scene of idleness. In other terms, obscene humor might function as an outlet for the releasing of sexual and class anxiety within the structural stuckness that congeals in an existential impasse the hope for upward social mobility. Conversely, the gesture might be read as a mocking confrontation with the photographers/viewers who are rendered passive as the joke is redirected at them. The entire sequence plays with the presence/absence of the photographers and the viewers in their participation/exclusion from the scene: while at times the subjects look directly at the camera, lending the impression that they are playing around with them/us, in other instances they appear unaware or as though they do not care. This discontinuity produces a disjointed mode of spectatorship wherein the photographic subjects have a higher degree of agency in comparison with conventional fashion stories in which the models appear to be deliberately posing for the camera or engaging with each other as characters in a story.

Compared to Danna Singer's photographic work of working-class communities in New Jersey, to give just one example of art and documentary photography of life in trailer parks, the pictures in "Memory" present us with a ludic, less tense, atmosphere in which the subjects

[62] It has been noted that Freud's joke-paradigm by implying a problematic triangulation of a male joker, a female object, and a male audience, may also solicit a misogynistic homoerotic reading of the joke-scene: both men are narcissistically allied in a shared, homosocial objectification of the woman; according to this pattern, the joke works by way of "sharing," only to then circumvent, the woman and thereby enables the two male subjects to divert, or reflect, the pleasure of their initial arousal toward each another (Smythe 1991: 20-21).

are active co-producers in the staging of the scene; whereas a series like Singer's more recent "If It Rained an Ocean" (2018) comprises snapshots that capture the emotional space of isolation of a community struggling at the outskirts of urban life, "Memory" offers a counter-mood of exuberant bawdiness. The address of the two series is obviously profoundly different (Singer's addresses social issues and is exhibited in art galleries while Hay and Parsons's caters to an audience of fashion/art magazine readers) as are the photographic subjects (in the case of Hay and Parsons's spread they are aware of being photographed for a fashion shoot and are supposedly animated by "lighter" moods). However, what I would like to suggest is that it is perhaps to the work of documentary photographers (like Singer) that Henninger's argument on the spectacularization of the working-class mentioned in the introduction to this chapter could be better applied, insofar as the photographic subjects are captured in the depressive moods which have been conventionalized in fine/documentary photography of the working-class at least since Diane Arbus. Conversely, Hay and Parsons's "anti-glamour" fashion pictures trouble both the canonical representations of commercial fashion photography and the stylistic and affective tropes of documentary photography: the photo shoot depicts subjects who appear to have the license to re-orchestrate the scene, challenging their interaction with the photographers and reframing the virtual engagement with the magazine reader.

Figures 49-50. Juveniles, "Memory," *Dutch* #30, 2000.

Two other young men in the following shots (figs. 49-50) match the slim body shapes and the pale skin, reddened by the sun or alcohol, of the female models. They represent the figure of the "juvenile," another socially despised trash category (Kipnis 1997: 130), which is often featured in independent fashion publications at the turn of the twenty-first century. However, it would appear that in this spread the aesthetic of the juvenile boy as it is fabricated in American movies from the 1990s is interlocked with titillating eroticism and humor. In a critical analysis of Michael Meads' photographic series ("Eastaboga") of mostly naked white young men in Alabama from the late 1990s, Scott Herring (2006) emphasizes how the subjects confound collective visual ideologies by failing to satisfy neat sexual taxonomies. As I have suggested in the previous chapter, masculinities that can be situated in a blurred libidinal flux without falling under the weight of identitarian categorization (and, in his essay, Herring speaks precisely of the irritation that unlocatable masculinities cause to a binary, straight/gay, epistemology), are consistently featured in *Dutch*. The white trash juvenile masculinities in "Memory" are peculiar inasmuch as they do not lend themselves to be read easily as "trade."[63] The photographic subjects use their bodies to hang out within the pervasively slow, bored temporality that coordinates their lives, separated from the fast pace of capitalist production.

[63] Historian George Chauncey (1995) defines "trade" as the stereotype of men who do not identify as gay but are open to having sex with other men. Larry Clark's work is considered emblematic of an eroticization of "trade boys" (Muñoz 1998).

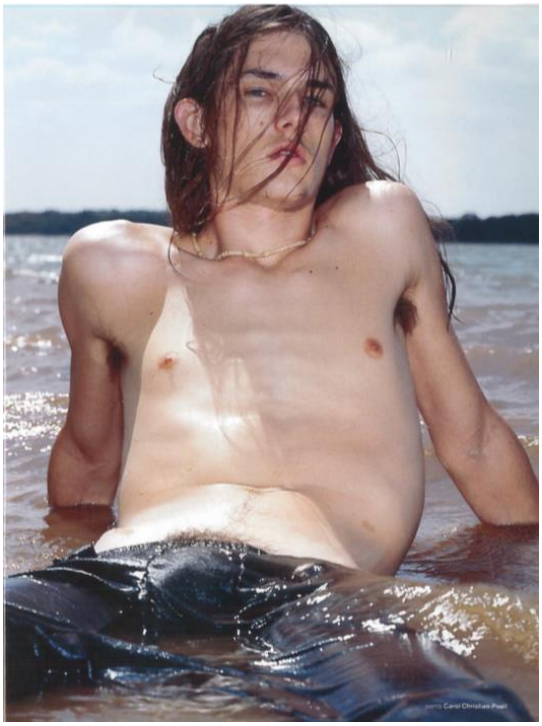


Figure 51. Male model, “Memory,” *Dutch* #30.

Another male model (fig. 51) is portrayed leaning on his arms in the water exhibiting his body in a more serious and calculated pose. There seems to be no humor here, merely the exhibition of a young body with exposed pubic hair. His staged seriousness is somewhat dissonant from the previous images. This affective modality of serious and confident self-exposure recurs in other stories in *Dutch* from the same years, wherein male subjects whose looks resemble the boys in Gus Van Sant's photographs more than actual fashion models, are portrayed like amateur porn actors. His long hair and facial expression are also proximate to the figures, mentioned in the previous chapter, of post-teenage disaffected youth that were cast in iconic Raf Simons or Hedi Slimane fashion shows and featured in their photographic anthologies from the early 2000s; however, in the context of this spread, the long hair and the armpit hair might signal the primitive “authenticity” of the working class, consonant with the shameless exhibitionism that pervades the scene. This male model appears one last time in the last two shots of the photo story (figs. 52-53). Here he shows the photographers/viewers his naked butt as he gestures a “fuck you” with both his hands; the picture overlaps a close-up, extended over nearly the entirety of the double page, of his legs and erect penis emerging from the water. This confrontational gesturality can be taken as a coherent epilogue of the erotico-political bluntness of the story.

Figures 52-53. Closing shots, "Memory," *Dutch* #30.

4.6 Obscenity as Queer Political Gesture

The affective salience of the scene constructed by Hay and Parsons lies in its reduction to bareness, or rawness (as I have already remarked, there are barely any clothes) in its confrontational attitude toward the consumer and the external world more broadly. Bareness could also be rephrased here as de-glamorization. Glamour, as Elspeth H. Brown discusses, is a "key technology of capitalist modernity" ultimately aimed at accelerating the circulation of all kinds of commodities in capitalist society, and is traditionally adopted in the corporeal styles of models as a way to enact a material seduction that sparks in the viewer a sense of utopian possibility (2017: 320, 312).[64] Along these lines, cultural anthropologist Grant McCracken spells out how consumer goods can function as tangible placeholders for hopes and ideals which are generally bound to failure in our everyday life. Glamour, according to

[64] Nigel Thrift defines glamour as "a specific style of allure" through which capitalism captivates collectivities, "inviting just enough familiarity to engage the imagination, a glimpse of another life, utopia as a tactile presence" (2010: 297). By way of this "*technology of public intimacy*" capitalism stimulates and embraces the "*practical aesthetic imagination*" in the process of "worlding" (290-291). On the collaborative relationship between fashion photographers and models in the "execution" of glamour, see Gundle (2008).

McCracken, is an instance of "displaced meaning" in the sense that it supplies meanings and aspirations in the guise of material goods and provides evidence of its actual embodiment, and thus attainability (as, for instance, in the style of celebrities) (1988: 104-106). He also seems to imply, however, that glamour might be beneficial in that protects societies from collective negative attitudes and feelings of despair and cynicism. Glamour, in other words, plays a part in feeding a collective fantasy of upward mobility and self-fulfillment, in spite of the fact that the desirable life it stands for might actually be out of reach (to provide a practical example: glamorous fashion designs will probably not equip the consumer with the body image they aspire to and for which the garments were originally intended). It thus institutes, using Berlant's well-known idiom, a relation of "cruel optimism" (2011a) insofar as it prompts in the subject the attachment to optimistic fantasies that will most likely stand in the way of their flourishing.[65] Simultaneously, however, linking Berlant to McCracken, these fantasies, magnetized by objects, produce pleasure and operate as temporarily beneficial strategies of affective survival.[66]

Within the overall de-glamorization of the photo spread, glamour is indeed taken on in the poses and is caricatured by bodies that create a theatrics of trash exerting no materialist seduction. In the unglamorous decadent setting in which these subjects are hanging out, their performance of glamour, if any at all, may be occurring only in the guise of parody. The subjects are indeed unglamorous and vulgar. The very ostentation of their bodies makes the glamorous context of fashion imagery and the production and consumption practices that materialize its existence appear problematic and possibly even ridiculous: that is, they bring out the ridiculous artificiality of fashion imagery by acting ridiculous themselves. They do so by turning into spectacle all that is normally abjured in fashion photography in order for glamour to flow out.[67] Thus, if mainstream fashion photography is one among many vehicles

[65] As historian Stephen Gundle puts it, historically "glamour [has] fired the imagination and boosted aspirations, while also offering industries the opportunity to produce fragments of glamorous experience for those whose aspirations remained unfulfilled" (2008: 396).

[66] Nigel Thrift stresses this point further, arguing that glamour generates aesthetic pleasure in the form of sensory emotional gratification, and that it is also a means for facilitating imaginary recognitions and forging affective allegiances, providing "affective senses of space, literally territories of feeling" (2010: 292).

[67] It should be noted, however, that glamour is, like any other aesthetic category, mobile and malleable. Fashion historians Valerie Steele and Caroline Evans have illustrated, for instance, how in recent times glamour has taken on the connotation of the high drama associated with celebrities, which is markedly distinct from images of "good taste" (Steele 2004: 42), as well as how self-identified gay designers like Alexander McQueen and Thierry Mugler have proposed excessive or parodic images of glamour often inspired by the hyper-femininity performed by drag queens (Steele: 43; Evans 2003: 120). In her canonical text on camp, anthropologist Esther Newton

for the transmission of commercialized feelings and the shaping of a public intimacy bound together by an aesthetic rhetoric of optimistic affect, this photo spread proposes a visual imagery of "inappropriate" affects and gestures that questions the very social, cultural, and economic function of the fashion photographic medium within the context of the creative industry. It is indeed in the setting of this last that capitalism constructs forms of "parasexuality" that employ glamour as an aesthetic tool of cultural management and profit-making. Parasexuality refers to a well-calculated and contained sexuality that operates within the boundaries of the hegemonic order, the glamorous embodiment of erotic license that sparks self-regulated and morally accepted desires under the aegis of capitalism (Bailey 1990: 148). Glamour operates in the liminal space of sexuality and a-sexuality, producing containable pleasure and therefore encouraging publics-consumers to experience desire within boundaries. The photo spread that I am examining here, instead, exceeds such boundaries and counteracts glamour with obscene foolishness.

Obscenity, as Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman write in regard to 1990's queer zines, is valuable political speech that often relies on affronting or negating its audience in order to exert political force, inducing the viewers to question where they are culturally and politically situated. Gestures of parody, for instance, demonstrate a disinvestment in the logics of the nation and violate its normative forms, ultimately claiming "to be *out beyond* the censoring imaginary of the state" (Berlant and Freeman 1992: 177-180). Thus, the hyper-awareness of the models-characters' bodies sustains their aesthetic strategy of embracing nudity straightforwardly thereby translating the trash body that is often held in contempt by the culture at large into a powerful instrument of dissent. Via their gestural mediality, these bodies suggest the possibility of effecting what Stallybrass calls "transgression," or counter-sublimation, which is defined as the "undoing [of] the discursive hierarchies and stratifications of bodies and cultures which bourgeois society has produced as the mechanism of its symbolic dominance" (1986: 200-201). They also induce an affective reaction that might spark critical thinking as well as imaginative ways of stretching the boundaries of representability in order to conceive of new collective aesthetic engagements with the dominant culture. In the context of my case study, the pornographic idiom expressed in the

(1979) discusses the relation between glamour and drag performances. John Waters himself often overlaps trash and glamour in his writing, particularly when he refers to Divine, "the ultimate glamour figure" in his films (2005: 180).

gestures of the subjects can be seen as a form of political speech that scorns the seriousness and uptightness of high and/or mainstream culture.

Mikhail Bakhtin, in his writing on carnival, hoped that the unearthing of folk humor could herald new forms of open and unpredictable communication. He stressed in particular the role of profanities, which, albeit not axiomatically connected to laughter, beginning in the Middle Ages have constituted a genre of communication excluded from the spheres of official culture and speech since it purported to break norms of decorum. He also suggested that profanities could produce a laughter that has to do with ambivalence (being disturbed and yet finding pleasure in its object) (Bakhtin 1984 [1968]: 17). The core principle of profanities is the display of the free possibilities of the material body, namely its openness and abjection. According to Bakhtin, "the material bodily principle" which makes the body become "exaggerated" and "immeasurable" "is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed." For the Russian literary critic, this is the "festive and utopian aspect" of the material bodily principle undergirding grotesque realism, for it creates the possibility of a "bodily life" that suspends "the drabness of everyday existence" (19).

Profanatory aesthetic forms like grotesque realism unveil "the bodily participation in the potentiality of another world"; they uncover "the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order, another way of life. It [grotesque realism] leads men out of the confines of the apparent (false) unity" (48). Bakhtin, in the context of this case study, allows me to offer a theoretical deliberation on how by bringing visibility to the materiality of the body, life might emerge as a collective force and, to use Agamben's terminology, might be reconquered for the use of the people. Profanations can thus be understood as aesthetically "low" forms of collectivizing affectivity that debase the urgency of self-fulfillment. In their gesturality, they disclose the common human potential of experiencing life with a sense of unpredictable curiosity that the atomization and privatization of the bodies preclude. In the pragmatics of gesturality, the resignification of the lower stratum of the body might disrupt the policing over the bodies of the lower classes and unburdens us from illusions, sublimations, and false seriousness (engendered by the fear of the *other* who is also *us*) (Bakhtin: 376).

As Bakhtin suggests and as I have anticipated in the introduction of this chapter, obscene performances can also produce ambivalent pleasure. Pleasure, arousal, and desire

are all aspects of a meta-response that, according to philosopher Matthew Kieran, speaks of our delight in imaginary moral transgression (Kieran 2002: 46). Representations of characters emulating sex acts might induce different sorts of feelings while possibly countenancing certain basic sexual desires. This meta-response that narratives seek to elicit is telling of our pleasure and, albeit only temporarily, of our excitement at the possibility of breaking free from the moral norms to which we bind ourselves in order to proceed with some reassuring sense of groundedness and belonging in the world. I take from Kieran that what such narratives set out to do is to conjure pleasure, curiosity, or fascination *within* the very negative bodily feelings (that is, "negative" for they might be cognitively judged as such) that are solicited (Kieran references John Waters' films as a case in point of pleasure in disgust). In other words, by displaying scenes wherein moral decency is abrogated, we indulge in the desire to align ourselves with such modes of affective disruption. In this sense, as I have explored in the previous chapter, fashion photo stories like "Paradise Lost" and "Memory" toy with our morals: the mode of engagement that they invite induces the pleasure of evaluating the world differently (and, perhaps, a-morally) from our pre-existing views. If we apply what Kieran argues about obscene narratives in cinema and literature to fashion photographs, images that might fall in the realm of the obscene could be seen to "naturally elicit or commendingly solicit cognitive-affective responses that abrogate her [the agent's] internalized moral prohibitions" (2002: 52).

Whereas in my previous case study the models retained an allure of ethereal wholesomeness and they were meticulously styled in a post-punk grunge fashion, here not only do we barely see any clothing, but even more importantly the models' looks are raw. These models provoke, challenge, and enrich the gestural economy of the fashion photograph by showcasing the body's constitutive unboundedness, its freedom. Thus, the queerness of their gestures lies in the potential effects of their performative affective rearticulation of their bodies within the frame of the fashion photograph. Queerness is intended hereby as "affective taxonomy," an expression with which Muñoz, inspired by Nancy, indicates "shared ways of looking and feeling that offer us a different sense of the world" (2007: 550). It is indeed the affective mediality, in the form of gestural profanation, of the models' bodies that brings into being the possibility of its functioning as a countercultural and political critique against social hierarchies as well as normative values and sensibilities. The disorientation and disalignment from prescriptive modes of looking and living bears a queer anticipatory

potential insofar as it unfolds the possibility of the otherwise with regard to one's comportment and social interactions.

I am cognizant that in this photo spread the carnivalesque affront to mainstream decorum that is performed by markedly gendered feminine bodies through nudity could be seen as shoring up male dominance; however, it is my argument that in the context of fashion photography the excess of these bodies is, for the reasons that I have unpacked throughout the chapter, as impactful as, albeit different from, more fluid and ungraspable figurations. This dissertation, in fact, surveys a broad spectrum of affective styles through which "lateral aesthetics" are enacted in response to the constrictive boundaries that exist within the visual field of fashion. In "Memory" the feminine bodies dominate the scene, while the male subjects appear to be embracing a supine disempowered position. Ultimately, the feminine bodies are "obscenely" marked by class in a feminist attempt to offer a carnal aesthetic response to idealizing or sanitizing paradigms for the representation of women's bodies in fashion imagery.

Light seriousness is, conventionally, the mode of address through which values, ideas, and meanings are distributed via the commercial fashion magazine: the fashion content has to be promoted and circulated with both written and visual discourses composing an aesthetic repertoire that is concomitantly easily legible, aspirational, and authoritative. It is the balancing of lighthearted escapism, commodity fetishization, and desire for self-transformation that most likely provides pleasure in the reader. In "Memory," instead, the characters counteract the very humorlessness which professional fashion models typically embody as an affective bodily tactic to exert credibility and, ultimately, desire in the viewer. "Memory" manifests the possibility of expressing unconstrained erotic impulses and discomposure in the pages of a fashion magazine as well as generating discomfiture, and possibly even laughter, in the reader. In addition to the symbolic and political meaning of the models' gestures, the photographers' undertaking could be read as profaning the very representational conventions of fashion photography. Firstly, the wide-open suburban space they have chosen as a location for the photo shoot challenges the "metronormativity" (Halberstam 2005: 36), or "visual metro norms" (Herring 2006: 220), that, alternated with the occasional far-flung exotic location, contributes to the construction of the cultural imaginary of fashion. Secondly, the photographers' operation consists in making the readers of the magazine join in the publicness of the photographed subjects not as much by way of

identification but by sympathy and allegiance with their bodily freedom and humorous expressivity. What is staged is a gag that mocks fashion as industry and system (in which both cultural producers and consumers participate).

The models' shameless gesturality is, in my view, what is particularly interesting in this case study, on the level of affect and aesthetics. This gesturality is displayed “in your face” with non-aspirational looks and poverty of clothing as a means to expose simultaneously the subtle violence of the expectations that are normally placed on the models' bodies and, conversely, the models’ openness to being freely re-staged, with the aim of reclaiming for themselves new (potential and virtually indeterminate) “uses” of their own bodies, a use which the industry heavily restricts through a grammar of poses and moods. Here I am echoing Agamben in his assertion that the apparatuses of the fashion show and the pornography industry compromise the value of the mediality of the models' bodies by diverting them “from their possible use” (2005: 91-92). Through the provocative mediality of their gestures, they lift the veil of the repressive artificiality of practices of glamour. I have argued that the white trash subjects in this photo spread, through acts of replication and collective mimicry, are poking at the mainstream identities commodified by the fashion industry and advanced capitalist economies more extensively. It is Agamben's contention that the specificity of the image is its own ability to crystallize gestures and to become a gesture itself. This is what, I suggest, happens with this photo story, and I have tried to evince what the mediality of the models' gestures reveals on the level of the hierarchies of visuality and representation.

In this chapter I have construed the model’s bodily gestures not only as pure affective mediality but also as a critique of the outside world that considers white trash bodies disposable. Moreover, in stressing the whiteness of “white trash” I have called attention to the complex entanglement of race, class, and sexuality in possibly generating disturbance in the spectatorial engagement with the images as well as in the social order. I have probed, on the one hand, how fashion photographic representations might solicit modes of spectatorship beyond mere disinterested aesthetic appreciation and toward considerations of one's own subjectivity and attunement to other bodies; on the other, through this case study I have proposed that the gestural mediality of bodies may enable feelings of social exclusion and unbelonging to be converted into an obscene, shameless, profanatory attitude toward the

outside that could serve to interrogate the hierarchical relational dynamics between differently marked bodies.

CHAPTER 5

Eccentric Feelings:
Children's Pleasures on the Fashion Set

In the previous two chapters I have explored the grunge feelings of disaffection manifested through a neutral style of action by a group of allegedly murderous teenagers (Chapter 3) and the heightened affective expressivity of the "obscene" gestures performed by "white trash" characters (Chapter 4). The affects examined in those two chapters may be considered, respectively, underperformed and overperformed. In this final chapter, I address the aesthetic forms in which fashion photo spreads that interrogate the visual rhetoric of childhood have circulated children's oftentimes ambiguous, inscrutable, and indeterminate ways of being. This chapter participates in the queer theoretical debates on childhood by showing how alternative fashion photography has devised affective scenes that problematize discursive and visual depictions of children. As developed throughout the dissertation, queerness suggests an affective mode of engaging with, dis/re- orienting oneself from, and making sense of the world: in this theoretical trajectory, queerness operates through the register of sensation and its aesthetic manifestations.

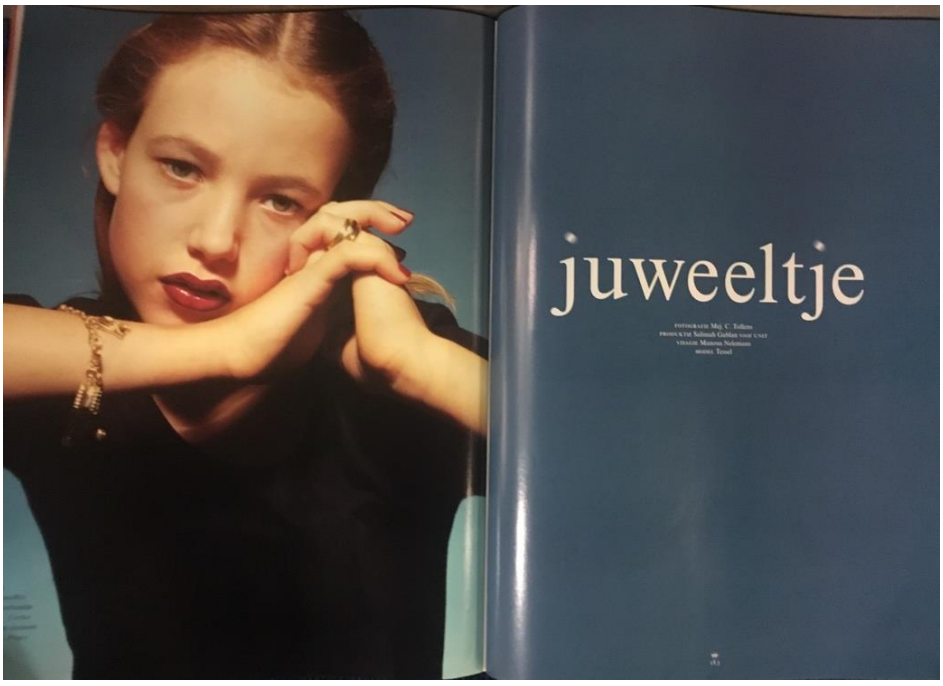
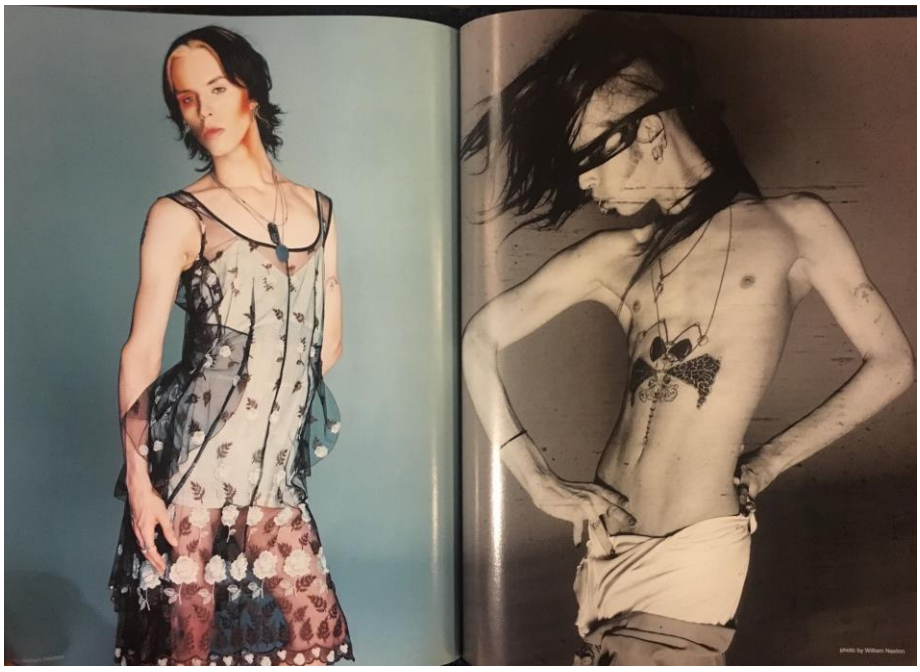


Figure 54. "Juweeltje," ph. Cornelie Tollens, *Dutch* #2, 1995.

This chapter constitutes one more illustration of how alternative fashion photography has attended to a queer refiguration of social relations by way of imaging affective worlds in which heteronormative reassurances surrounding gender, sexuality, sociality and feeling are eroded. In the face of fashion photography's contribution, whether in the form of editorials or advertisements, to the shaping of the gendered public fantasy of the child, this chapter quarries the kinds of figurations that in alternative fashion magazines might stimulate alternative ways of thinking and feeling in relation to children. Figuration, as argued by Teresa de Lauretis, allows for the design of a space that opens "onto the otherness in the world," pointing "to another cognition, a reading *other-wise* of gender, sexuality, and race" (2007: 259).[68] The case study hereby analyzed is a short editorial spread (composed of four double-pages) titled "Juweeltje," shot by Dutch photographer Cornelie Tollens in 1995 for the second issue of *Dutch* (fig. 54).



Figures 55-56. "U-th!," ph. William Naxton, *Dutch* #14, 1998.

Between 1995 and 2000 *Dutch* magazine published three fashion editorial narratives that evaded the sanitized rhetoric of innocence as well as the glamorization of children's

[68] With a closer focus on embodiment, Donna Haraway defines figurations as "performative images that can be inhabited" (1997: 11).

sensuality that normally characterized fashion shoots involving children. “Juweeltje,” my case study, is the first of the three. The other two photo shoots at least deserve a mention. In 1998, *Dutch* devoted its fourteenth issue to the exploration of youth: interviews with Malcolm McLaren, promoter of the Sex Pistols, and article features on Lee Williams (whose post-grunge novel *After Nirvana* [1997] recounted the life of young hustlers in Oregon engaging with drugs and bareback sex) provide the discursive framework for the photographic portfolio “U-th!,” a gallery of pictures of children and youngsters, each taken by a different photographer (figs. 55-56). The photo spread is introduced by a text, penned by the editor-in-chief Matthias Vriens, in which, in light of the then current social panic about “kiddie porn,” he argues for retaining and cultivating those feelings toward children which have come to be misconstrued as “perverse” and “unnatural,” as well as for circulating non-gendered representations of children that account for the coexistence of masculinity and femininity in each one of us.

Figures 57-58. “Vespers,” ph. Philippe Cometti, *Dutch* #27, 2000.

In 2000, a photo spread titled “Vespers” shot by Philippe Cometti (for issue #27) portrayed a naked child sprawled out on the lap of a pre-teenager dressed in clerical clothing (figs. 57-58). The two subjects in the story bear a close resemblance to one another and

interact freely with one another's bodies: they might be brothers and/or lovers, and they occupy the scene with an uninhibited sense of ease in front of the camera. In the late 1990s, cases of child sexual abuse by Catholic priests began to receive public attention in North America and Europe, with investigations revealing historical patterns of covering up allegations and reports of abuse across the world. Cometti's photo spread asks the viewer to note the child-model's ease in front of the camera as well as his own pleasurable engagement with the other male body, which, in these images, is also used by the child as a prop. Here, narratives of abuse and speculations on children's defenselessness leave space for the possibility of deliberate intimate encounters that resist definition. These scenes of queer childhood probe ideas of child sexuality and intergenerational forms of kinship, and thereby forge a visual trajectory for rethinking childhood in queer terms through an affective prism.

After introducing my case study, I will proceed to trace the historical-discursive formation of childhood innocence as a phantasmatic figuration and to discuss different queer theoretical approaches to the study of childhood. Next, I call attention to fashion representations of children that confound heteronormative renditions and assessments of children's growth. As Jack Halberstam argues, childhood is potentially anarchic, and it is by attending to low-brow archives featuring children (such as, in Halberstam's examination, animated films) that "anticapitalist logics of being and acting and knowing" as well as "covert queer worlds" can be brought to the surface (2011: 20-21). Following Halberstam, I will suggest that queerness is inherent in childhood and that queer re-figurations of childhood might contribute to complicating, enriching and nuancing the social imaginary around children. Along this line, I provide an account of childhood as a queer terrain characterized by a contingent indeterminacy in which the child's imagination and psychic investments allow for detours and disorientations that conjure up or anticipate queer forms of life. Finally, in delving into a visual analysis of "Juweeltje" I illuminate the dissonances and ambiguities that make this photo spread a valuable instance for reimagining the child beyond a dichotomy of purity and sexuality.

5.1 Childhood Erotics in Fashion Photography

Figures 59-60. “Juweeltje,” ph. Cornelie Tollens, *Dutch* #2, 1995.

“Juweeltje” is a photo spread that revisits Guy Bourdin's jewelry editorials from the late 1960s and 1970s. It was published in an issue that came out just as the media panic around “kiddie porn” was reaching its peak (that same year, as I will discuss, a controversial Calvin Klein ad campaign for kids’ underwear was released): it can, thus, be read as a challenge by *Dutch* to the polarizing rhetoric of media discourses surrounding child pornography and to a longer tradition of fashionable representations of children in glossy publications. “Juweeltje” in Dutch means “little gem” or “little jewel.” It is also used as a term of endearment for “beauty” (to colloquially address someone who *is* a beauty) or as the Dutch equivalent for the North American colloquial term “doozy” to connote someone or something troublesome or to index an outstanding and extraordinary attribute. On the opening page of the editorial we come across the first name of the model: Tessel.

Throughout this editorial spread Tessel is dressed in monochromatic black dresses, in simple, fairly conservative, shapes. Her Josephine Baker-reminiscent look and make-up emphasize her femininity, while her hairstyle and, more generally, her still developing body retain hints of androgyny. The discrete, unremarkable outfits, paired with the understated and yet visibly fine jewelry and vivid make-up might conjure the aesthetic of the “lipstick

lesbian" that was becoming popular in the mid 1990s.[69] Cultural historian Reina Lewis has parsed how since the 1980s fashion magazine editorials began to regularly employ visual codes prompting "lesbian visual pleasure." She argues that while flicking through fashion magazines, lesbian pleasure may arise either in the sensitive act of decoding potentially lesbian subcultural hints offered by the editorials or in the sense of transgression derived from constructing an alternative narrative to what is actually denoted by the photo spread (Lewis 1997: 94-96). These identificatory gestures operate, according to Lewis, by means of recognizing and navigating a certain ambivalence in the images (1997: 107-108).[70] The consumption of fashion imagery, in fact, in addition to involving identifications with the photographic subjects (*to be* them and/or *to have* them), consists of "an investment in the activity of looking and desiring in itself" (Lewis 1996: 404-405).

Lewis's suggestion that "queer pleasure" is formed beyond representation, while still relying on its signs, is germane to the arguments I have developed earlier in the dissertation: in the encounter with the photograph a periperformative space exceeding the boundaries of the photo itself might open up, and here lateral fantasies can be forged. It is indeed in this imaginative space that a "sense" of a queer aesthetic community might be attained. Lewis, albeit using identitarian phrasing, makes an analogous point as she claims that a lesbian hermeneutic of the fashion magazine responds to the necessity of interpreting the practice of reading fashion magazines as generative of "imagined interpretive communities of other lesbians" (1997: 95). However, notwithstanding considerations of possible lesbian pleasures and identifications, my analysis in this chapter is concerned with the ambivalence created, at least in part, by the photographer. This ambivalence, which, as I will unpack, is obtained by endowing the young female model with agency in the constitution of the scene, destabilizes the hierarchical gender and sexual dynamic of the photographer-model relationship, hence enabling a more creative construal of the adult-child encounter.

The contrast between the stark anonymity of Tessel's clothing and the boldness of her make-up and jewelry telegraph upper-class status and refined cosmopolitan taste: at first glance, this might appear to be what this photo spread is all about. However, this would have

[69] On "lesbian style" and postfeminist identities in relation to queer cultures, see Karaminas (2013a; 2013b). On the lesbian spectator as consumer subject of media texts and representations, see Clark (1991).
[70] For a comprehensive discussion of lesbian pleasure and identifications in the consumption of fashion images, see Lewis and Rolley (1996) and Fuss (1992).

been at odds with the philosophy of the magazine and, presumably, would have frustrated its readers, typically interested in unconventional styles and creative cultural outlooks. Cornelie Tollens, the photographer of this editorial spread, is an Amsterdam-based artist who mostly uses fashion photography as a testing ground for photographic series that blur the genres of fashion, art, and porn. Her creative practice is preoccupied with capturing the pleasures of the feminine body, flirting with pornographic signifiers without, however, reducing the body to a passive object: animals and in/organic matter (usually weird objects, meat, and flowers) are used as props for sensuous feminine exploration, testing bodily boundaries and digging into its cavities (fig. 61).

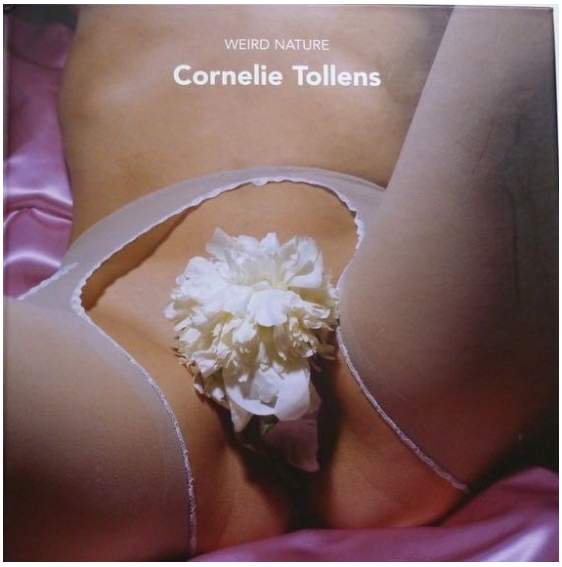


Figure 61. “Weird Nature,” book cover, Cornelie Tollens, 2002.

Figure 62. “Vamp girl,” Cornelie Tollens, 2001.

All the orifices of the female body become loci of erotic pleasure and exploration, both for the photographic subject, whose erotic experiments are chronicled by Tollens, and for the visual pleasure of the photographer and viewer. The peculiarity of her work lies in her understanding of the body as vital matter, not just a surface but a fleshy assemblage of sensory receptors with its own agency and thinking patterns. Her subjects appear fully involved in the activity of grasping a sense of their own self by way of engaging their body in different acts, as though not standing in front of the camera; and yet, in her series there is always a shot that reminds us that the model is indeed aware of the gaze of the photographer/spectator (fig. 62). As José Teunissen puts it, Tollens's images “are charged with sexuality and fit to burst with unfettered sensuality, but at the same time they place us, as onlookers, in an uneasy position: [...] is this actually intended for our eyes or might we be undesired voyeurs? Usually young, the models seem to be highly aware of our presence” (2015: 64). This capacity to visualize the body as fully agentive and yet complicit with the gaze of the other results from the bonding she manages to secure with her subjects (she normally devotes entire series to just one model).

When I interviewed her about the shooting of this story, Tollens described her encounter with Tessel as follows: “I was at the birthday party of a son of a girlfriend once, a couple of years prior to this shoot, and saw this Lolita type of girl, dressed up with heels and red lipstick. I thought she was really inspiring and the ideal type for my work. I did a lot of photoshoots with her. She was really into it too. Later in life she became, and still is, my best

friend."[71] She went on to say that what is peculiar about shooting younger models is that they act more freely, they are less controlling of their bodies, and it is this lesser inhibition, or added spontaneity, that allows for a unique exploration of what she refers to as the mystery of feminine sensuality. The scenes developed by Tollens are never preconceived: they arise on the set, in consultation with the model, and they evolve intimately in an atmosphere of freedom and trust obtained by spending the entire day together. As a result, though the young women in her photos are often "playing a sophisticated game that sows confusion [...] they are not there to please, to oblige us. They are showing themselves because that is what *they* want, not because we want it" (Teunissen 2015: 64). In her work she is particularly fascinated with how younger women perform adult gestures and moves, which, being less self-regulated, turn out unexpected or even disturbing. In our conversation, she stressed the importance of contrasts and ambiguities in her work, which in the photo story examined in this chapter are expressed in a lively rendition of innocence and sensuality. Such an exploration could be seen as consonant with Sally Mann's work (to which I will return in the next section): in the work of both of these photographers, the scene is normally occupied by the children's bodies, whose freedom and playfulness upset the expected physical and moral containability of the child.

Figure 63. "Hard Love, contrary to public decency," Cornelie Tollens, 2008.

[71] My interview with Cornelie Tollens took place March 11-19, 2019.

Figure 64. “Gender Studies,” Bettina Rheims, 2014.

In Tollens’s work, the concept of nature is central: that is, nature as a loose, malleable and resourceful embodiment that precedes, or overcomes, discursive signification. By virtue of the corporeal grounding of her practice, gender ambiguity also finds a place in her work, conjuring the visual narratives of other female art and fashion photographers such as Bettina Rheims, with whom multiple overlaps could be singled out: for instance, the recent “Gender Studies” (2014) series by Rheims (fig. 64) seems to be nodding at Tollens’s “Hard Love” (2008) (fig. 63). Her fashion photography in the early 1990s constituted an experimental platform for initiating a study of female subjectivity that would soon become crucial in her creative practice. Although, as Tollens recalled, she was granted full freedom by the editorial team of *Dutch* to produce the images that she wanted, fashion photography in comparison to art photography still poses some restrictions in terms of the visual discourses that can be disseminated to the wider audience of magazine readers. Taking this into account, photo shoots like “Juweeltje” represent an opportunity for those photographers who, like Tollens, hybridize genres, to test concepts, attitudes, and looks which are later on reformulated for platforms**,** such as fine art and porn, which might afford even more risky forms of exploration and representation.

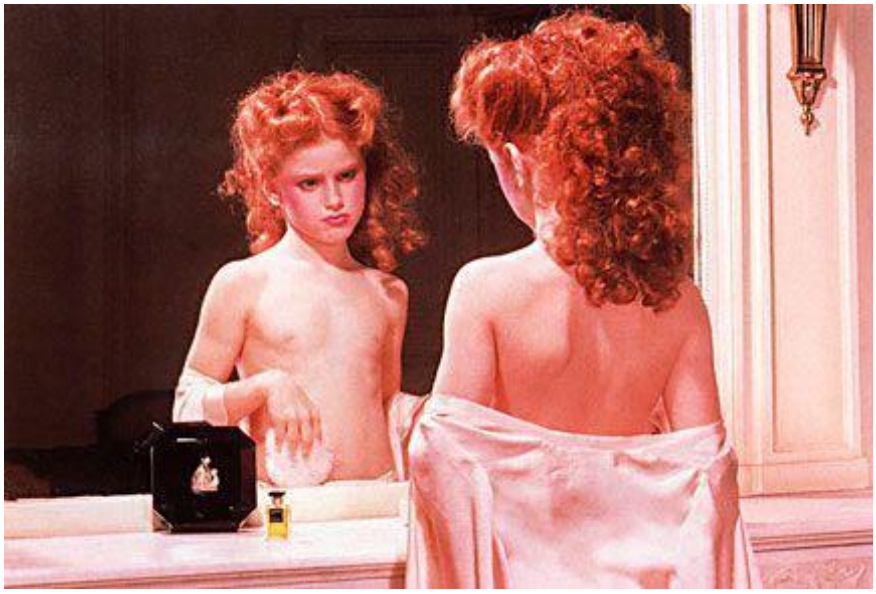
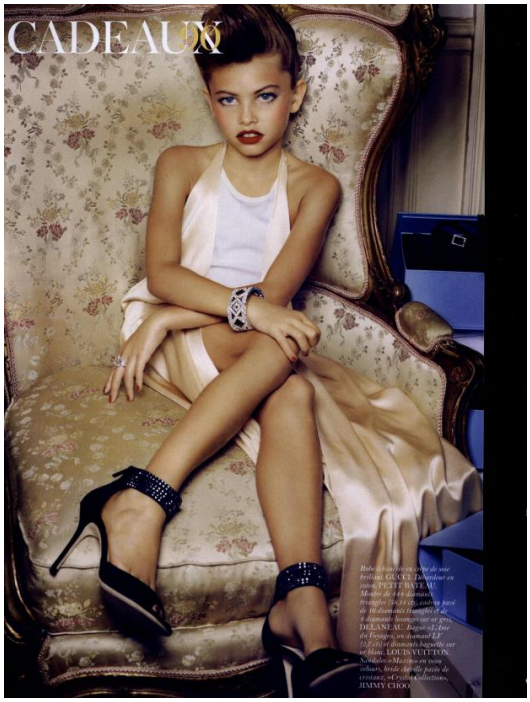
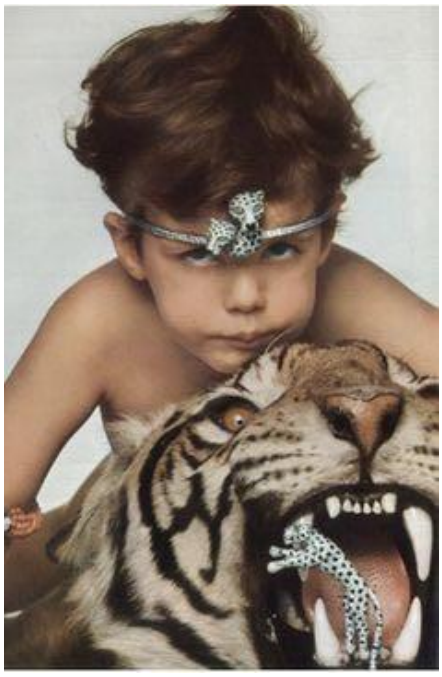


Figure 65. “Cadeaux” photo spread, ph. Guy Bourdin, *Vogue Paris*, 1978.

Fashion photography provides multiple examples of editorials featuring children; however, in this section I will discuss my case study in its specific relation to a trend of sexualized childhood that became common in mainstream fashion imagery in the 1990s, partly owing to the widespread recuperation of Guy Bourdin's and Helmut Newton's sexual iconography in magazines like *Vogue Paris*. These were the years in which the so-called “porno-chic” aesthetic took form, and the Helmut Newton-inspired advertising campaigns for Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent created by Carine Roitfeld, Tom Ford, and Mario Testino became iconic. The December-January 1978 issue of *Vogue Paris* had featured a fashion editorial titled “Cadeaux” (*Gifts*) photographed by Guy Bourdin. It depicted half-naked female children styled like flirtatious women, in provocative poses, inciting the eroticizing gaze of the viewer. In one shot in particular (fig. 65), which I take as emblematic of the photo story, a child with an undeveloped bare chest is looking at herself in the mirror, with her red voluminous curls styled in a 1940s-inspired Victory roll updo: her blush pink satin night-gown is coming off, setting the spectacle for the scopophilic pleasure of the viewer. The title is also eloquently ambivalent: the photo shoot was published in the Christmas issue of the magazine, hence “gifts” supposedly refers to the garments featured in the spread that the reader could purchase as presents; however, given Bourdin's controversial personality, “gifts” could also allude to the children themselves: (female) children as gifts in the hand of the (male) photographer.



Figures 66-67. “Cadeaux” photo spread, ph. Sharif Hamza, *Vogue Paris*, 2011.




Figures 68-69. Jewelry photo spread, ph. Guy Bourdin, *Vogue Paris*, 1969.

In 2010, photographer Sharif Hamza and fashion editor Carine Roitfeld reinterpreted Bourdin's story in an editorial spread with the same title for the December-January 2010-2011 issue of *Vogue Paris* (fig. 66-67). They retrieved and accentuated all the stylistic tropes from the original story (particularly in terms of fabric and motifs: the leopard print and fur, for instance, were also abundant in the former spread). Here the young models are overly styled in adult fashions and opulent jewelry. It is a tribute to Bourdin: the heavy use of jewelry is inspired, in fact, by another Bourdin photo shoot from the January 1969 issue, where undressed younger children were adorned exclusively in chunky fine jewelry pieces (figures 68-69). The poses, setting, and looks exuded wealth and sensuality: two signs that clashed with the imaginary of the pure innocent child.

The sexualization of the children in the 2010-2011 photo shoot sparked massive clamor in the media on a global scale, leading to condemnations of the magazine as promoting paedophilia, and eventually the dismissal by Condé Nast Publications of long-time editor-in-chief Carine Roitfeld from her appointment at the helm of the French fashion title. As the international debate surrounding the photo shoot peaked, and akin depictions of children in both print and television began threatening conservative values throughout both Europe and the United States, the British prime minister David Cameron commissioned a review on the putative sexual pressures faced by children, which led to the publication of a state-funded report known as the *Bailey Review* (taking the name from Reg Bailey, the Chief

Executive of the Mothers' Union which was in charge of leading the inquiry) which brought under focus the commercialization and sexualization of children in the media. Although published in the U.K., rather than within the countries in which the editorial spreads I am discussing were produced, the *Bailey Review* can be taken as exemplary of the widespread debates, on a global scale, surrounding the sexualization of children effected by commercial businesses.[72] The results of the review, published in 2011, comprised fourteen censorious recommendations that were expected to drastically reduce the production of visual material involving children and their exposure to sexualized imagery.

The review, which sparked innumerable critiques within academia on the grounds of, among several other factors, its reliance on inaccurate understandings of sexuality, gender stereotyping, problematic assumptions about the effects of images on children's identity, and its veiled intention to survey and control their agency, testifies to the web of fears and social anxieties undergirding the symbolic formation of the child in the social imagination (Barker and Duchinsky 2012). As Teresa de Lauretis explains in relation to cinema, which could also be applied to fashion photography, images produce *imaging*: they articulate meanings and desires engaging the spectator in a semiotic practice that is constantly inscribed in ideology; they produce and reproduce values and ideology by way of involving the viewers' own perceptions and subject positions in the process of outlining a social imaginary (1984: 37-39).[73] The review's title, "Letting Children Be Children" evinced how the main concern for the state was that the media, and in particular printed magazines, were exerting too much pressure on children to become adults: this premature and perilous tendency was sensed as a threat posed to the rhetorical fabrication of the child as the bright poster image for the future of the nation.

That the relation between childhood and innocence is a socio-historical construct has become a truism in cultural theory. Some succinct considerations are however key here to understanding how fashion imagery has partaken in the process of both shaping and challenging the imaginary around the innocent child: this double gesture of reinforcing and

[72] See, for instance, the "Corporate Paedophilia" report published in 2006 by the think tank "The Australia Institute," according to which advertising and marketing platforms increasingly sexualize children's bodies. This is available at: http://www.tai.org.au/node/1286.

[73] "Imaging," as conceived by de Lauretis, is a process of the materialization of fantasies (thus, fashion images can be considered as visualizing fantasies through technological means); "imagining," instead, refers to our creative capacity to develop individual and collective fantasies, which can then be tangibly manifested through imaging processes (de Lauretis 2007: 122-123).

unsettling norms, as I have shown thus far in this dissertation, is a crucial operational feature of fashion photography. For instance, by way of promoting conventional masculine clothing and color shades for boys and, vice versa, clothing signifiers of (heterosexual) femininity for girls, mainstream fashion photography has historically rigidified gender codes as well as their stereotyping. This is a modality that has been challenged, since the 1980s, by independent style publications, which have served as a groundbreaking springboard for displaying multiple and idiosyncratic styles of masculinity and femininity.

Fashion scholar Annamari Vänskä, in her comprehensive study of children's representation in the history of fashion advertising, investigates how a magazine such as *Vogue Bambini,* released by Condé Nast Italia in 1973 as the first magazine exclusively devoted to children's styles, played a major role in fashioning the fantasy of an upper-class lifestyle for the majority audience of middle-class readers that projected onto the ethereally refined child-models their own fantasies of upward mobility and thereby sought to accrete aesthetic capital through their own children's appearance. For many years, fashion magazines like *Vogue Bambini* contributed to the sedimentation and dissemination of the fantasy of a heteronormative "good life" through eroticizing the almost otherworldly innocence of the attractive, white, and unquestionably straight, child.

The 2010-2011 "Cadeaux" photo shoot was relatively provocative in terms of how it challenged the safe leisure reading practice of its consumers—who were used to seductive, and yet contained, depictions of women older than the young girls in that photo shoot—by presenting them with eroticized pictures of children. However, its move was nevertheless in the direction of a reaffirmation of heteronormative stylistic codes. The children in the images were indeed the readers' own children (in fact, the young model in figures 66 and 67 is Thylane Blondeau, daughter of the French football player Patrick Blondeau and TV host Véronika Loubry) and the clothes were by the same high-end designers regularly featured in the magazine pages. Overall, the scenario is typical of French glamour, as fabricated by publications such as *Vogue*, *Elle*, and *Glamour* since the 1960s. This is to say that the magazine readers probably found the editorial spread fairly amusing or intriguing insofar as it portrays dress-up scenes of children who look comfortable in the embracing of familiar clothing styles. My hypothesis is that the readership, overall, must have grasped the tone, as well as the intertextual references, of the photo shoot, which actually reinstated their own aesthetic expectations and unthreatening curiosity (the readership also strongly cherished the creative

work, taste, and personality of the magazine's editor, Carine Roitfeld, who had thought up and styled the remake of the fashion story).

The wider society, however, beyond the circuit of *Vogue* readers, saw in the images a reality that, while perhaps aspirational, risked compromising the integrity of their values. Whereas those who condemned the images were confronted with a style of embodiment that, perhaps, diverged from their aesthetic and moral coordinates, the *Vogue* readers may have seen in them just a possible reflection of their own (actual or imagined) lives. Following this line of thinking, one could generalize and assert that what prompted the chastising of those images was a middle-class fear of having one's moral values imperiled: they panicked over the possible loss of control over their property, namely, the non-agentive child; they failed to acknowledge that they were indeed amplifying, if not manufacturing, "sexualization" by way of generating a scandal around those images. This paradox is partly due, as is often the case when social turmoil is caused by pictures, to the embracing of a narrow realist strategy for reading fiction: the images are taken to be denotative, instead of connotative (i.e. with symbolic, evocative, and emotional aims).

Moreover, the different public reception of the two photo shoots from 1978 and 2010 further attests to how sexualization, and the set of fears and anxieties sustaining it, is a concept that is culturally and historically specific. Indeed, it fits well in our own context (or near context in 2010-2011, when the second photo spread was shot and published): in a time of social and existential precarity and structural impediment to collective well-being, the child has likely become the repository of collective hopes or delusions; additionally, with children's overexposure in the society of the spectacle and the always more precocious use of technologies through which new figurations can be shaped, often by children themselves, the idea of childhood as a precious time of delay from adulthood has become obsolete and detached from pragmatic reality.[74] It is by virtue of this ordinary "crisis" in the present that the detractors of images of the kind that I have shown may be seeking some form of reassurance that their (race and class-specific) world will not be wiped out. Conversely,

[74] Vänskä cogently observes that in the capitalist framework wherein children can "represent and see themselves as marketable products, commodities, and cunning entrepreneurs of self," popular fashion imagery contributes to construct the child as the neoliberal ideal: represented as the agent of her own self-fashioning, she is bred by the fashion system as, concomitantly, idealized version of innocent childhood and as grown-up cosmopolitan consumer; in this way, the child is "an essential part of the ideology of neoliberal subjectivity" for she magnetizes the conflicting aspirations for a better life (2017: 186-190).

Bourdin's pictures in the 1970s generated disturbance only *a posteriori*, and in effect his "Cadeaux" photo shoot went unnoticed at the time of its publication: throughout the 1970s, with the liberation movement fighting to de-pathologize homosexuality, and, among other sex-positive claims, to allow children to express their own sexuality, some of the tenets of the sexually repressive ideology were being unsettled, and new pluralizing and democratizing sexual ethics were emerging. As a result, the child re-emerged as a figure of potential freedom from the moralizing chains of adulthood: a symbol of desire.

The double construal of childhood as sexualized/sanitized (corporeal/incorporeal) in fashion imagery is consistent with what Vänskä pinpoints as the specific affective operation of fashion photography: manipulating—thanks to its reliance on intertextuality, from disparate media or fashion images of the past—the affects in the images in order to critically inform or challenge discourses circulating in society (2017: 181). Put differently, fashion photography uses aesthetic affect as a way to stabilize or disorient the codes that tangle our social experience in the world. According to this logic, the images from the *Vogue Paris* photo spreads that I have discussed could be simultaneously read as consolidating the sexist predatorial gaze and fantasy of a male adult, virtually embodied by the photographer, or as challenging the assumptions about the innocence and asexuality of children. As I have argued earlier, however, these interpretations are nonetheless inscribed in a heteronormative framework that does practically nothing to shift the axis of the discourse around children toward a more open account of their subjectivities. In response to this ineffective operation, the photo shoot "Juweeltje," as I will show, interrogates the paradigm of the sexy/innocent child by way of devising a new figuration of the child that does not fall under the rubric of straight normativity.

5.2 The Fabrication of Sentimental Childhood

Photography has played a crucial role in shaping and consolidating the mythology of the child thanks to its ability to fix and circulate norms and ideas across the visual public sphere. Photographs, especially in the infant stage of the medium, were collectively perceived as compellingly realistic for they were considered mere machinic renderings of empirical optical observations. Yet, it was photography that would eventually problematize the imagery of

innocent childhood allowing for the proliferation of previously unexpressed public feelings and discourses. At the heart of the collective emotional reactions that images might provoke lies the misconception of photography as an objective and neutral medium and the difficulty for the viewers to inhabit the threshold space where, in the encounter with the image, they are expected to assess the discrepancy between factual reality and the fictive representation of said reality. In other words, failing to grasp that a photograph, with varying degrees of artistry, is a presentation of a certain outlook on the world rather than its literal mimetic translation might explain violent and/or censorious responses to certain images.

The development of the model of innocent childhood has been traced back to the seventeenth-century Christian adoration of the Infant Jesus, of which the asexual, incorporeal, and unsullied child became the transubstantiated image. The figure of the child was gradually imbued with Christian values, which visually translated into an aesthetic of the angelic amidst the alleged corruption of the material world. This conception of the child is identifiable through a shift in artistic representations: whereas during the seventeenth century European paintings depicted children as miniature adults, dressed in the same clothing styles and sporting the same attitudes and poses as the adults, from the eighteenth century onwards they were othered as innocent figures deserving to be shielded in view of their ability to approximate a transcendental plane of existence (Vänskä 2017). A look at pre-modern Dutch paintings from the seventeenth century would show how the poses and the attire of the children signaled their families' social rank and the outward appearance that they would, or at least were expected to, present in their adult life: such representations displayed moral stature, wealth, and a masculine authoritarian attitude with which the image of the innocent child would come to collide.

Historian Philippe Ariès (1967) famously interpreted this shift in artistic representation as indicative of a passage from the treatment of the child as a proxy of an adult to the consecration of the child as a unique human entity detached and protected from adulthood. Before this shift, in fact, children used to sleep with the adults, and by sharing the same intimate socializing spaces in the home they would, for instance, see them having intercourse (and there was no sense that their growth might be negatively impacted since there was no such concept as innocence in their understanding of the world); in the eighteenth century children started sleeping apart, different tones were used by their parents to address them and caution in language was advised in their presence, playing activities were supervised by

adults, and children's books became an editorial genre. The child came to be blueprinted as a chaste, morally unspoiled creature that needed to be protected. Other historians disagree with Ariès's reconstruction, arguing that the protective attitude that parents assumed toward their children had started long before the Enlightenment (Steward 1995). However, it is reasonable to believe that when artistic depictions of innocent childhood were beginning to appear, several shifts were also occurring in society: the emergence of a private middle-class nuclear family and the division between public (masculine) and domestic (feminine) spaces were just two among other factors that could throw light on the new sheltering attitude toward the child.

British painters such as Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) and Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788) in the eighteenth century introduced a new vision of the child that art historian Anne Higonnet has termed "Romantic childhood" (1998: 9). Contrary to the mini-adults in the depictions from the previous decades, the children portrayed by these academic painters looked completely detached from adults' lives and concerns: they were characterized by an absence of want or desire as well as by a lack of visibly social, sexual, or emotional markers. In the words of Higonnet, romantic childhood, as a subject, deflected knowledge because it was fashioned as a denial of children's sexuality (2002: 204). In the eighteenth century, the naturally "good" child, sheltered from the evils of adult life, was exemplified by Rousseau's *Émile* (1762): Émile was presented as a mythically innocent child whose wisdom and freedom were acquired through self-directed and spontaneous growth, in contact with nature and unspoiled by civilization. He came to exemplify a view of childhood as innately virtuous and non-corrupt. Both art and literature concurred in the proliferation of this image, whose pleasure and desirability resided perhaps in the capacity of the child's image to evoke the illusion of a suspension of life's threats and the fear of human finitude.

Literature scholar James Kincaid, however, has persuasively brought to light the erotic allure of children's constructed innocence: images of innocence imply in fact the very possibility, on the side of adulthood, to violate it (1992). As art historian Marilyn R. Brown elucidates, in fact, childhood has been a primary site of emotional projection by adults, and "representing them [the children] visually can project adult questions and assumptions about the social order and can place children in a political (and often sexual) economy that is greater than the contingency of the individual child" (Brown 2002: 1-2). If the child is portrayed as a blank canvas, then adults are implicitly invited to color it by projecting their own fantasies

onto it (Kincaid 1992). Kincaid argues that childhood innocence is a rhetorical category that has a reifying effect: children are ultimately eroticized through the disavowal of their own sexuality. The Victorians' and Edwardians' ostensibly innocent images of children, according to Kincaid, were latently sexual for they positioned the child on a distant and morally superior plane from adulthood, and this distance, or boundary, between unsullied childhood and sinful adulthood rendered innocence paradoxically alluring. This tension, which Kincaid identifies at the core of "romantic childhood", is especially relevant for discourses around paedophilia and the misguided conservative assumption that sanitized depictions of children would forestall or dispel the predatory desire toward children. Kincaid reads the "romantic child" as an "empty figure" on whom the adult might project fantasies that are deemed socially unacceptable: the actual elevation of the virtuous child to a superior status in closer proximity to God can actually be interpreted as eroticizing the child itself while at the same time marking its untouchability (Kincaid 1998).[75] Fashion photography, as I will explore, is masterfully skilled at balancing out this tension between the sensual and the pure in respect to childhood imagery.

Although in the early twentieth century Freudian psychoanalysis deconstructed the myth of innocent childhood by illuminating the child's "polymorphous perversity", the image of the Romantic child has nevertheless persisted as a cultural representational norm until the present day. The sanitized image of the child slowly and yet pervasively engendered a rhetoric of hope for social and ethical amelioration which was pivoted on its figure: the (idea of the) child, deprived of bodily autonomy, self-determination, and desires, became the gatekeeper for a better future, crystallizing in an asexual body conservative moral values and aesthetic composure. The iconography of childhood innocence disseminated by eighteenth century paintings began to percolate into mass production, hence permeating popular consciousness, and fashion became instrumental in materializing this identity through clothing styles and

[75] In a similar vein, feminist literary theorist Jacqueline Rose, in her work on children's literature, reads the child as an ideological category whose functioning within a system of cultural meanings she parses through the concept of fantasy. She writes, "It will not be an issue here of what the child wants, but of what the adult desires—desires in the very act of construing the child as the object of its speech" (1992: 2). The child, according to Rose, represents a site of fantasy for the adult insofar as it is a canvas onto which we situate what we choose to believe about ourselves and the world as well as the place where we project uncertainties and insecurities in the attempt to disavow them. Rose is, thus, interested in the child as an adult's construction of fantasy: fantasy, from her psychoanalytic vantage, is a crucial function in the continuous process of identity formation, wherein "all subjects—adults and children—[...] have to cohere themselves to the accepted register of words and signs" (Rose 1992: 141; Owen 2010: 266-267).

colors that would connote innocence (such as white or pink loose dresses in soft fabrics for young girls) (Vänskä: 71-74). Child portraits were being reproduced in large quantities in children's books and greeting cards largely thanks to the technological advances in printing: the expansion of print markets went hand in hand with the development of commercial illustration that allowed childhood images to enter the mass market.

Moreover, as gender roles further polarized and women were more closely associated with maternity and domesticity, the subject of childhood became an appanage of women. Female illustrators, such as Kate Greenaway, mastered simple and innocent representations of children targeted to adults which lent themselves to easy reproduction: as a result, pictures of innocent children entered consumer culture as they were printed at growing speed on every possible commodity, in particular household goods, whose primary consumers were indeed women (Higonnet 1998: 54). Through the work of these illustrators, childhood innocence was becoming a "style" marketed for consumption. The sentimental theme of childhood innocence became so pervasive at the turn of the twentieth century, due to the massive expansion of the magazine market and the serialization of illustrations and advertisements, that a feminine sentimental culture formed around such imagery; in other words, the proliferation of child images was congruent with a bourgeois female ideology that retreated into domesticity and the consumption of "women's genres."

Anne Higonnet writes that "by the beginning of the twentieth century, the Golden Age of Illustration was giving way to the age of the photograph" (1998: 73) and the visual imagery of childhood innocence was being consolidated by photography, which, thanks to its "reality effect," made innocence appear even more convincingly real and natural (86). As photographs became easier to reproduce in the 1920s and 1930s, commercial magazine photography turned childhood into an actual consumer genre, which is still popular today, where funny and cute elements updated and yet reinforced the innocent, optimistic image of the child, as the successful work of contemporary photographers Anne Geddes and Betsy Cameron demonstrates. As Marilyn Brown has put it, "A burgeoning industry in children's toys, books, magazines, songs, clothes […] helped market the child as a symbol of progress and of the future" (2002: 3); in other words, the capitalist commodification of the child advanced the social imaginary of the child as the bearer of a promise for a better world. However, as I have mentioned earlier, it was indeed photography's presumed objectivity that throughout the twentieth century would trouble the conventionalized imagery of the innocent child.

An example is offered by the photographic work of Lewis Carroll, who had taken a multitude of pictures of little girls in the second half of the nineteenth century. He believed that innocence was a natural quality of the child and that by simply adjusting the setting and the clothes to the bodies of the child-models in front of the camera, the camera itself would inevitably bring out that property (Gernsheim 1969). In other words, he seemed to be unaware of the determining role that he, as a photographer, was playing in visually producing said innocence, for he relied on an idea of the photograph as a neutral transcription of material reality. At closer inspection, however, many see in the "natural" portraits of his "child-friends" an erotic interest in their bodies: along these lines, beginning in the 1930s critics have raised concerns about Carroll's relationship with his photographic subjects (and, later on, the disappearance, or erasure, of a large part of his photographic archive contributed to corroborating these suspicious claims). What is interesting about Carroll's case is the following paradox: his presumed impartial approach to photography and his belief that the child's "truth" would be rendered manifest through the process of photographic emulsion actually revealed a different truth, namely that his relationship with the models had unexpectedly injected the images with a certain eroticism.

In the 1920s, photographer Edward Weston participated in the Modernist move toward abstraction, and his stunning sculptural pictures of his son Neil, conceived within this context, marked a turning point in the artistic practice of photographing children. Weston's pictures of his son were not the first well-known instance of professional artists interested in capturing the bodies of their children through the camera lens. The Pictorialists at the turn of the twentieth century had depicted children, often their own, hedonistically: their bodies were explored in the context of a pastoral life in which their innocence was somehow intensified; simultaneously, however, (homo-) erotic desire was often imbued in the images, for instance by way of glorifying the young male body through the codes of a nostalgic antiquity, as was the case with Fred Holland Day's pictures. What Pictorialism introduced was an idea of photography as an emotional presentation of a world for the viewer's imagination rather than a documentation of external reality.

Figure 70. “Jessie at five,” Sally Mann, 1987.

The work of Sally Mann is equally indebted to the Pictorialists and Edward Weston. Her own children are captured in their rural life on the photographer's farm in Lexington, Virginia, as they conduct their daily activities detached from the rhythms of urban living. In this modern Arcadia, Mann's children are scrutinized in their unknowability, and their sensuality is viscerally explored. The potency of Mann's work derives from a committed, intense exploration of childhood in all its ambivalence, with a peculiar attention to the ways in which such ambivalence is conveyed through the children's bodies. Photos like “Jessie at Five” (1987) (fig. 70) or “The New Mothers” (1989) document a sensual mode of performing adulthood: these images end up illustrating children’s aspirational reenactment of adulthood as a gesture of defiance against the prescribed limits of childhood itself.[76] She inaugurated a filterless style of non-sentimental representation of children's “truths”: they appear unavailable, as they are immersed in their own world, and yet uncontainable in their bodily expressivity and mimicry of adulthood.

[76] Mann's work, as is well-known, became controversial as she was accused of exploiting the intimacy of her children for commercial purposes, and her own relationship with her children was called into question. She blurred the spheres of public and private by way of collapsing her own as well as her children's personal and professional identities, and converted the sentimentality of childhood imagery into passion, thereby replacing self-denial with self-assertion and unleashing impulses and desires in a form that had been previously contained (Higonnet: 199). Like Mann, Claire Henze, who photographed her undressed children from infancy to young adulthood, received negative criticism throughout her career. Her black and white pictures are sculptural depictions of children's bodies engaged in acts of self-discovery and sensuality. See, for instance “Nico, hand on back” (1981) and the series “Childseyes” (1983-1985).

Figure 71. “Megan et Maëva,” Jock Sturges, 1998.

Changes in childhood imagery and the desire for alternative representations developed in the second half of the twentieth century and reached an apex in the 1990s when consumer culture proliferated highly commodified images of children, confounding the boundaries of childhood and adulthood as well as sexualizing the child, while at the same time the media were striving to retrieve the ideal of childhood innocence by means of legally surveilling and repressing child pornography. As the crisis of the sentimental child grew more intense, the scope of child pornography law, controlling pictures of all kinds and holding photography responsible for the escalation of child abuse, widened. A notable example is that of the American photographer Jock Sturges, whose photographic studio in the 1990s was raided by FBI officers that confiscated his equipment and whose books risked being classed as child pornography in a few states. His large-format black and white prints of naked adolescent girls shot on the beaches in California and France (fig. 71) have been concerned, since the 1970s, with the visual investigation of the body as a site of emerging sexuality, in an attempt to capture the signals of the passage from childhood to adulthood. The response provoked by his pictures may also be understood through the lens of Kincaid's theory: Sturges's work, in his representation of young girls whose physical traits and attributes are not fully developed (an aesthetic that Sturges calls “counter pin-up”) and who show no display

of eroticism, may paradoxically be read as suspicious for its very celebration of unselfconscious "innocent" bodies and its almost religious abstraction of the subjects.[77]

The shifting of the social imaginary of the child, in line with an expansion of the children's fashion and beauty markets, could also find evidence in the United States in the spread of the child beauty pageant circuits, as documented by Mary Ellen Mark, amongst other photographers. Pictures of little girls attired in high-heeled shoes, jewelry, and make-up had become a common theme in commercial fashion photography starting in the 1970s, and the career of fashion modeling was begun at an increasingly younger age. The case of Brooke Shields launching her career posing nude, playing the part of a child prostitute in *Pretty Baby* (1978), and becoming the most coveted and expensive model in the 1980s after starring in Richard Avedon's Calvin Klein Jeans advertising campaign is an indicative example of this trend.

Figure 72. Calvin Klein boys' underwear campaign, ph. Mario Testino, 1999.

[77] Similarly, Czech art photographer Jan Saudek's career began, like Sturges's, in the 1970s and his work with prepubescent subjects generated censorship attempts in the 1990s. His early work in particular is known for its evocation of childhood. One of his iconic photographs, "Black Sheep & White Crow," was removed from the Ballarat International Foto Biennale in Australia in 2011 after the Child Safety Commissioner and the local council complained that the picture appeared to show a mother prostituting her child (Stapleton 2012: 119).

In the summer of 1995, the Calvin Klein company was accused of child pornography: the advertising campaign shot by Steven Meisel for the multi-million-dollar fashion house depicted young models in poses that incited peeking at their underwear. Both the poses and the setting were seen as a nod to porn movies and the company was swiftly forced to pull the ads. In 1999 another Calvin Klein campaign (fig. 72), in this case for underwear, shot by Mario Testino, followed the same path as the pictures of children playing on the couch in their underwear were seen as reminiscent of tropes of "kiddie porn" (Vänska 2017: 113-114). What the Calvin Klein scandals, among many others, showed is that in the 1990s it had become patent that consumer culture, through powerful industries such as fashion and beauty, was furthering the sexualization of children for commercial purposes. Thus, whereas the law operated in respect to the clamor and the anxiety that such representations engendered in the public realm, said images were indeed produced within mainstream public culture with unprecedented commercial success. On this matter, Higonnet (1998) argues that the contradictory attitudes toward images of children in contemporary Western society reflect a tension between the public and the private: the protection of "children's rights" assumes that a child should be sheltered within the private realm of the family from the exposure to the capitalist market—and, symbolically, to the state and its collective institutions—which is cast as a treacherous area in which the child's identity might be at risk.

Against this background, on the one hand, mainstream fashion magazines were solidifying archetypical representations of (straight, white, middle-class) childhood as a state of innocence, while on the other, they featured advertising campaigns (from brands such as Calvin Klein, Moschino, and Kenzo) depicting sexualized children. In other words, commercial advertising featuring children found an ideal platform in the ad-driven fashion magazine, which, although steeped in a fairly conservative middle-class ideology, was particularly receptive to commercial trends.

Changes in the representations of children and the relationship of these representations with new discourses on sexuality beginning in the 1970s, as well as the history of social and legal persecutions faced by dozens of photographers since the mid-1980s, deserve further unpacking. Such an investigation would be of particular importance with regard to how new sexual ethics in the wake of the sexual revolution and the gay liberation movement contributed to upsetting morality and the symbolic gap between the

desires and pleasures of adults and those of children.[78] The paranoia around the paedophilic sexualization of children has indeed a precedent in the panic which had mobilized, beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a witch-hunt against suspected paedophiles and a moralizing regulation of both commercial and artistic childhood imagery. As queer cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin ([1984] 2002) has pointed out, the panic surrounding children's sexuality served the purpose of moralizing sexual object choice with the consequent exclusion and oppression of queer possibilities: in other words, the public affective mobilization in defense of children's innocence mirrored the state's intervention to normalize sexuality.

For the purpose of this chapter, I have prioritized a discussion of the construction and deconstruction of the myth of the sentimental child and the process by which the work of fine art photographers such as Sally Mann, as well as more commercial fashion photography, primarily through advertisements, participated in a revision of the sacred image of the child with representations that de-sanitized childhood imagery and updated it by endowing the children in the photographs with bodily autonomy, self-awareness, and expressive freedom. This brief and far from exhaustive contextualization elucidates, on one hand, how the symbolic association of childhood with innocence is a sedimented construct harking back to a long ago past that has come to be embedded in the social imaginary; on the other, how fashion imagery has functioned as, to borrow from de Lauretis, an "imaging machine" for such a symbolic figuration of both chaste untouchability and sexualization.

The latter function of fashion photography is particularly interesting if we consider that the *Bailey Review* and akin inquiries promoted by nation-states were actually responding to what was considered a menacing effect of the media, and magazines in particular: their tendency to sexualize childhood, therefore jeopardizing its moral stature. This reveals how fashion images have often been understood as either reflective of general moral values in society or as immoral objects, on the basis of the ideological needs of the dominant culture and society. I am hereby reiterating what I consider the twofold potential of fashion photography: its capacity to image and rigidify social and aesthetic paradigms as well as its capacity to toy with and alter such paradigms, often by prompting in the viewer imaginings

[78] For an in-depth discussion, from a queer vantage, of panic around underage queerness, the controversial politics of children's visual representations, and consent, see Pat Califia's *Public Sex* (2000), in particular the essay "No Minor Issues: Age of Consent, Child Pornography, and Cross-generational relationships." *Gay Left* also featured a number of insightful essays on intergenerational kinship, consent, and paedophilia with a gay/lesbian feminist approach: see, for instance, the thematic issue "Happy Families? Pædofilia Examined" (1978/79).

that permit them to sense the possibility of other worldly formations. Whether to reinforce or to disrupt visual social codes, fashion photography operates on the social fabric by way of maneuvering through the order of the sensible.

5.3 The Ideology of the Child

Queer studies scholars have argued that the insistence on childhood innocence structures sexual ideology and is inseparable from a homophobic agenda (Kincaid 1998; Ohi 2005): its main purpose is to contain the child's queerness and to alienate it by way of inundating the visual public sphere with images that, whether sexualizing or sanitizing, have to be comprehensible to and regulatable through straight eyes. Queer theorist Lee Edelman has advanced a notoriously fervent critique against the figure of the child, which he sees as the ground upon which homophobic forms of sexual normativity take place. He argues that the figure of the child represents the symbolic promise and lynchpin of the universal politics of "reproductive futurism," which "perpetuates as reality a fantasy frame intended to secure the survival of the social in the Imaginary form of the Child" (2004: 14). In other words, the figure of the child is fixated on the reproduction of heteronormativity. Edelman's reasoning ultimately arrives at an antisocial, future-negating, affirmation of queerness as the embodiment of a narcissistic death drive. For Edelman the future prefigured by the "Child" takes the form of a contract that reassures against the *jouissance* of the Real. He opines that in spite of the involvement of many queers in the preservation of this contract, queer sexualities still have the capacity to enact a "radical dissolution" of said contract and to embrace its negation (16).

With respect to Edelman's position, this chapter takes up the task of investigating alternative affective figurations of the child, that is, not of disbanding the child as constitutively heteronormative but attempting instead to assess how images can be used to interrogate ideologies of innocence. While Edelman's position suggests that the figure of the child is ontologically and teleologically bound to guarantee the sovereignty of heteronormative sexuality and sociality, this chapter has emphasized that childhood innocence is a cultural construct, emerging from a specific historical context, that has never been stable, and therefore more nuanced attempts to challenge its imagery are hereby a

preferred pursuit.[79] Nevertheless, Edelman's polemic also provides a crucial link with the sentimental fabrication of the child addressed in the previous section, for it posits that the logic of reproductive futurism is directly implicated in animating the sentimentality that regulates the social legibility of the Child. In his words, "The politics of reproductive futurism [...] organizes and administers an apparently self-regulating economy of sentimentality in which futurity comes to signify access to the realization of meaning […]" (2004: 134).

Whereas Edelman refuses the prospect of imagining alternative possibilities to figure the child before or beyond heteronormativity—as is made even clearer by his much cited statement: "Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized" (2004: 29)—ultimately dispensing with both the child and the future it is projected and project/s us into, Lauren Berlant has called attention to the mediating function of the figure of the child in relation to the ideals of citizenship and the nation, hence providing a powerful critique not to the figure of the child per se as much as to the historical consequences of her infantilization.[80] Berlant reads the child, specifically in the context of American culture, as the symbolic and political condensation of the heterosexual fantasy of citizenship (1997). The child, and in particular the image of the "little girl," embodies the "future citizen" in the name of which the state polices morality regarding sex and non-normative representations of sexuality and social life. The rhetorical discourse that sustains this logic is that good parents, by protecting the still "un-historical" little girl, would allow her entrance into the domain of "national heterosexuality" that citizens typically seek to inhabit (2004b: 60). The attainment of citizenship in the "fantasy world" that is the nation is an abstract aspiration to a "dead identity" that is frozen, or fixed, instead of being alive and in play, and that responds to an idea of national culture that resists an aesthetic of "live" sexual and affective experiences in the name of childhood, youth, heterosexuality, and the future. The safeguarding of the aura of the little vulnerable girl from the perils of sexual, perverse, or immoral behaviors and/or their representations, becomes paradoxically a cover for defending the "zone of privacy" of adult heterosexual national culture; in this respect, the infantile consolidation of the child as

[79] For a critique of Edelman's negation of childhood queerness and his preemptive inscription of the child into a heteronormative ideological matrix, see, among others, Snediker (2009: 225) and Bruhm and Hurley (2004: ix-xxxviii).

[80] In this chapter, for stylistic purposes and consistently with much literature on childhood, I privilege the use of the female pronoun to refer to the child. The child-model in the photo shoot under examination is indeed a little girl. However, I use the neutral "it" for the child as an abstract entity or category.

the embodiment of the future is co-dependent on the infantilization of adult citizens (2004b: 67-68).

In a nutshell, for Berlant the child is (constructed as) the bearer of the promise of corporeal safety and privacy—that zone where heterosexuality is protected "as a sacred national fetish" beyond the troubles of alterity—which are vital in the horizon of "fantasy national culture" (1997). According to this model of citizenship, which Berlant terms "infantile," potentially destabilizing acts or affects on the part of minoritarian subjects (queer children included) are alienated in favor of what is deemed a virtuous and patriotic "abstract" ethics. To such a model, Berlant counterposes a "non-infantilized political counterpublic" that embraces "live," "non abstract," complex, and incoherent activities of world-building which reject the utopian identifications solicited by infantile citizenship. What Berlant's critique points to is how the dominant culture, even in the form of the popular, the trivial, and the domestic operates at an intimate level to forge models of belonging that sustain a specific ideal of society, the nation, and the state. In the "intimate public sphere," or the world of public intimacy, the figure of the child as needing protection has come to signify a hegemonic model of society.

This has happened especially as a collective, anxious response to the shifting norms of sexuality and the family that have emerged in the decades following the 1960s (Sturken 2012: 356). The sense of threat caused by these changes has been embodied by, in Berlant's idiom, the "ex-iconic" figure of the white heterosexual man who is faced with the need to reinforce his values insofar as citizenship is de facto being reimagined by the entry of new and different subjects-citizens in the public sphere. Within this affective-political framing, the child functions as an object of displacement to mediate the instability of the categories (of the nation, citizenship, etc.) which the figure of the child has historically depended upon. Thus, the child and her parents are presented as "innocent" in the narratives that promote the survival of the above categories: innocence ultimately functions as a powerful sentiment serving to recuperate the sense of the nation under threat. The nostalgic fantasy of the family has become a site of longing and identification that orients the enactment of a certain kind of good life in the "intimate public sphere" and the utopian restoration of the unity of a "lost world" as a horizon of political aspiration (Sturken: 357-359).

According to the speculative trajectory around the child that I have highlighted via Edelman and Berlant, "proto-gay childhood must be forged out of a decidedly

heteronormative institution," placing the emphasis on the normative power of the figure of the child (Kidd 2011: 183).[81] In the context of this chapter, while the aforementioned orientation provides an important framework for understanding the affective power of the child in the collective political imagination stoked by institutions, I want to pursue an analysis which has an almost antithetical point of departure: childhood is inherently and intimately queer. Halberstam, positing childhood as "a queer form of antidevelopment" stepping out of the trajectory of heteronormative production, puts this more bluntly: "The child is always already queer" (2011: 73).[82] Along these lines, queer theorists such as Kathryn Bond Stockton and Kevin Ohi have embraced the queerness of the child and have proposed a further exploration of the aesthetic and erotic dimension of childhood as opposed to framing it within a heteronormative ideology. By refusing to ascribe a telos or an essence to the figure of the child, childhood queerness can be conceptualized, following queer childhood literature, "as a strategy for suspending the question of destination, for keeping open an at least notional possibility of errance, in refusing to encase a virtually ready-made identity in an essentializing category" (Lesnik-Oberstein and Thomson 2010: 45).

As children's literature scholar Gabrielle Owen observes, an equivalence can be posited between the instability and malleability of gender, sexuality, and identity as the tenets of queer theory and the very complexity that belongs to the idea of the child (2010: 255), which "signifies contradiction, movement, contingency. [...] The child is paradoxically the site where even the simplest language becomes unpredictable and impermanent" (265). Owen advances the idea that the recognition of the child as a fantasy and an ideological construction "provides us with ways to both contain the queer and strange [of the child], and to delight in the possibility of the queer and strange" (268), which is to say that by highlighting how the (figure of the) child is contained through the presumption of heterosexuality in normative discourses we can, conversely, unfold its potential queerness against, to borrow a formula from Jacqueline Rose, "the accepted registers of words and signs" (1992: 141). The figure of the child thus allows us to revise its ideological construction by activating movement in the form of play, paradox, and possibility. In so doing, the fantasy of the child can become

[81] For a psychoanalytic discussion of the "proto-gay" child, see Sedgwick (1991) and Moon (1998).

[82] In response to Edelman's postulation of the Child, Halberstam submits that "there are alternative productions of the child that recognize in the image of the nonadult body a propensity to incompetence, a clumsy inability to make sense, a desire for independence from the tyranny of the adult, and a total indifference to adult conceptions of success and failure" (2011: 120).

promissory of a rearticulation of the possible, a stretching out of the spectrum of what reality could turn out to be: fantasy has indeed the double function of containing and escaping the limits of the not yet actualized (Owen: 268-269). This kind of approach attends to the child in her transient occupation of a liminal space of fantasy and pleasure to which the adult does not have access.[83]

In contrast to a theoretical exploitation of childhood as a blueprint for the formation of an adult identity, Elspeth Probyn proposes imagining childhood as a singular, evental space of "whatever": this construal of childhood would serve as a strategy for disabling general claims about identity, and enabling, instead, queer theoretical interventions on a dimension of multiple experiential possibilities. She criticizes how childhood is often politicized as a starting point for a queer teleology and proposes instead to attend to queer childhood as a series of possible events (as opposed to essence). She writes:

> I want to place childhood on the surface of things, to refuse it the anterior status of guarantee. Rather than see in childhood a common point of queerness, a Garden of Eden from which we all fled or were expelled only to return ever after in nostalgic wonderment and wandering, I would have queer theory use childhood 'to record the singularity of events outside of any monstrous finality'. [...] In other words, far from treating childhood as an originary moment from which we might emerge as proud grown-up queers, we need to remake childhood into evidence of the necessary absence of any primary ground in queer politics (1995: 440-441).

Instead of romantically placing queer childhood as a grounding or a beginning of adult subjectivity, Probyn tackles it "as an errant logic that always goes astray" (1995: 446) and whose retrieval, in the form of images and recollections, is dislocating and disorienting rather than formative and reassuring (456). Probyn's theoretical tactic consists in reconceptualizing queer childhood as a realm of "suspended beginnings," which can be visualized as a matrix of

[83] This is in striking opposition to post-structuralist accounts of the child as a theoretical resource through which to reform the subjectivity of the adult. Marta Castañeda disputes how post-structuralist philosophers have proposed figurations of the child that are all presupposed on the erasure of the child's own experience and subjectivity. For instance, Foucault figures the child as the embodiment of an experience de-anchored from history and society: this "voided" space lends itself to being taken up by the subject as a site of transgressive potential; for Deleuze and Guattari the child is the form, or condition, of *becoming* and virtually anyone can inhabit childhood: as Castañeda puts it, "[For Deleuze] To inhabit the child [...] is to inhabit the condition of possibility itself; and to inhabit the condition of possibility is to become a child" (2002: 146); Lyotard, like Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari, posits the child-figure as pure form to be inhabited in order to disrupt the normative subject. What Castañeda wants to demonstrate is that childhood is figured by these philosophers as a quality, a feature, or a potentiality internal to the subject whose embracing becomes transformative for the adult subject, while the child is voided of her own corporeality and experience: the child is not seen to be an entity but a mere contentless form at the service of the adult subject's self-reformulation.

interconnecting points from and with which new departures ca be initiated. In other words, queer childhood may inspire the mobilization of forms of the "not yet" toward unexpected actualizations. To an extent, Probyn's account makes landfall on the same disembodying tendency of the poststructuralist philosophers who inform her discourse: namely, it postulates childhood as a matrix from which new planes of adult subjective development can unfold.

In response to the disembodiment, and the ultimate risk of elision, of the child, queer approaches that do not overlook the material specificities of the child in her subjective engagements with surrounding spaces and objects may be better equipped to redress the figure of the child as a queer subject with its own agency and capacity for imaginative world-formation. Despite the child's relative incapacity for self-representation, which prevents us from an accurate account of her subjectivity, images can prompt an encounter with childhood imagery where the child's body and its (e-)motions are, at least imaginatively, accounted for. The virtual encounter with creative images of childhood might allow us to navigate ambiguities and contradictions without making claim to knowledge of children. In other words, having recognized that "the child is a thoroughly social category and form of embodiment, constituted through the interaction of the agency of nature and a continually regenerating social world" (Castañeda 2002: 166), the affective figuration that I will foreground in the next section accounts for the queerness that emerges in the agentic process through which the child assesses her presence, instead of promoting a formulaic return to an imaginary pre-adult phase in order to better understand queer adult subjectivity.

Instead of presuming an ontological distinction between child subjectivity and adult subjectivity and seeing the former in terms of a fantasy of otherness through which the adult subjects can rethink themselves, I am interested in childhood as a queer creative space where children develop their own capacity to be informed by and, in return, to shape the world they inhabit. In other words, through figuration, the queerness immanent in childhood will be parsed in its propensity to foreground affects and gestures that may be unknowable to adults. My case study will be utilized as a ground from which to unearth the affective ambiguity that I see as a peculiar mode of, or style of figuring, queerness.

5.4 Affective Thresholds

Figures 73-74. Double page, Tessel/toy, “Juweeltje,” Cornelie Tollens, *Dutch* #2, 1995.

Figures 75-76. Double page, toy/Tessel, “Juweeltje,” Cornelie Tollens, *Dutch* #2, 1995.

In the *Dutch* photo spread from 1995, each picture of the young model is juxtaposed with an image of a soft toy. In the double-page montage of the editorial, she has no other model counterpart. The solo presence of a child-sitter in a photo shoot is an unusual practice, insofar as multiple children are involved in the composition of what is normally considered a proper children's fashion shoot. The dégradé teal background suggests the auratic atmosphere of a dream: the stark monochromatic setting does not offer further visual clues for identifying a material context. It is within this virtual intimate space that Tessel hangs out, perhaps bored or clueless as to how to entertain herself. Her postures, seemingly spontaneous and not staged according to the conventional modeling scripts of fashion photography (see the *Vogue Paris* spreads), are modeled according to the shapes of the toys (or, conversely, the latter might have subsequently been added to the montage so as to replicate her movements).

Psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott (1971) wrote about how children's playful engagement with objects is crucial for the development of their imagination as well as of a sense of themselves in relation to the world. Such an emotional and cultural experience is further discussed by Winnicott using the language of capacity: playful transitional engagements unfold the potential for "creative living" through the child's imaginative experience of producing and experimenting with her self in the creative use of objects (1971: 100-102). To borrow the language used by psychoanalyst Adam Phillips in his discussion of the Winnicottian child, her "education" consists of the "self-fashioning project" that freely develops from the object-usage in which each child "makes something of [her] own" and makes sense of herself as well as her surroundings (1998: 56). In this dimension, both Winnicott and Phillips identify the very freedom of the child through which she imaginatively shapes her own world (Phillips, a Freudian, links such a freedom to desire and sexuality, hence placing a great deal of importance on the child's sexual curiosity in relation to forms of play). What makes Winnicott's theory of the child peculiarly resonant with queer understandings of child creativity is its emphasis on the social power of aesthetic imagination, as well as its concern with play as a mode of transitional and inconclusive knowing through which one's life can take multiple directions. The psychic creativity of the child, which is foundational for our adult aesthetic experiences, bears the potential to untether desires and affects that have yet to, and may not, be known. Children's imagination, in addition to paving the way for certain forms of life to take shape, is also, in itself, a process that troubles adult rationality and sense-making.

Tessel is not physically interacting with the stuffed animals, and yet her poses are modulated on theirs and they are themselves adorned with jewelry the same way Tessel is. In a space where no referents or spatio-temporal coordinates can be pinpointed, she occupies a transitional and separate dimension with which the adult viewer cannot directly relate. Kathryn Bond Stockton, in her compelling inquiry into queer childhood, evocatively claims that "the (lesbian) child requires an interval of animal": she argues that in the temporal delay preceding adulthood, coupledom, and parenthood, which the (assumed "straight") child is expected to virtually inhabit,

> animal/child affectionate bondings can offer opportunities, queer as they will seem, for children's motions inside their delay, making delay a sideways growth the child in part controls for herself, in ways confounding her parents and her future. [...] The dog is a vehicle for the child's strangeness. It is the child's companion in queerness. As a recipient of the child's attentions [...] the dog is a figure for the child beside itself, engaged in a growing quite aside from growing up. (Stockton 2009: 89-90)

Applying Stockton's insights to my case study, external objects or companion species––which are together here only for the sake of argumentation—nurture the child's imagination and license affective relations and metaphorical substitutions that might usher in new futural orientations in the world vis-à-vis expectations of linear and vertical growth. Within the spatio-temporal dimension of the "delay", instead of following suit (i.e. straight), the child can sense and cultivate her own strangeness by way of lateral movements and relations with objects onto which she projects love, pleasures, and desires.[84] With this in mind, for the queer child any non-human object is a repository of affective relational potentialities through which she could bypass straightness.

Tessel could thus be seen as "growing sideways" (Stockton 2009) within the only apparent stasis of the delay in which she is immersed. In such an interval, by seemingly doing nothing, she might be forming lateral pleasures and fantasies prior to, and beyond, the coding of adults. The ambivalence in which she dwells is a "temporalized bargaining," to use Berlant's wording: ambivalence offers a lag in which fantasy is developed "not as a site of clarity or even cognitive mapping but as a scene of bargaining," that is, a space in which to come up

[84] Within this queer interval, queerness itself is dislodged from its attachment to sexuality and can be redeployed, instead, as a critique to normativity in its teleological binding of the subject to a linear past-present-future. For a critique of "chrononormativity" and the ideation of multiple queer affective temporalities, see Dinshaw (1999), Freccero (2005), and Freeman (2010).

with and work out desires, thoughts, and alternative worlds (Berlant, Tyler, and Loizidou 2000: 511). In the case of Tessel, bargaining can also be a metaphor for negotiating her separation from the scene of adulthood. Her self-absorption in (non-) activities detaches the viewer from the possibility of attaching meanings onto her. The self-involvement of Tessel, paired with a look that is not typical of a young girl but that does not strictly mimic adulthood either, locates the scene on a plane of inscrutability.

Whether performing for her own pleasure or also, in part, for the photographer's, Tessel looks remarkably mature with respect to how she conducts her own body and plays with sexuality and innocence, possibly disorienting the spectator. This photo spread, like "Vespers" (mentioned at the beginning of the chapter), urges us to rethink the set of the photo shoot as a stage on which the child can independently and self-directedly perform her sexual desire and express her creativity. Whereas in the children's photo shoots produced by glossy magazines such as *Vogue Paris* the child-model is styled and photographed (by a male photographer) like a sexy doll, or a portrait miniature whose poses mimic the professional top model's, and is surrendered to the gaze of photographer and spectator, here the child creates a non-story with the photographer, trusting in their intimate connection in order to express a sense of bodily autonomy and self-determination. I am arguing that if *Vogue* played a part in the commodification of little girls by representing them as manufactured dolls, henceforth normalizing the fantasy of the young girl as an expensive sex toy in the hands of an adult, *Dutch* proposed instead figurations of little boys and girls that draw attention to their use of the body, that is, to how their bodies may help us rethink representations of childhood within and beyond the visual field of fashion. "Juweeltje" calls into question the visual vocabulary of sexuality and innocence derived from a tradition of (heterosexual) fashion representation not only by messing with its tropes but also by foregrounding the agency of the child-model through an ambiguous solo performance of girlhood. In so doing, it problematizes the visual rhetoric that energizes what art historian Carol Mavor calls the "cult of the little girl" (1995: 42).

Tessel is toying with mildly erotic poses (in fig. 76, as well as, less strikingly, in fig. 60, on page 202): her pose and gestures oscillate between audacious and surrender. The irreverent and teasing gesture of biting her finger (in fig. 73) is as erotically charged as her bending pose (in fig. 76), with the hair thrown on the table, the arms pressing down, the leg raised behind, and the languid look in her eyes conjuring the setting in motion of an erotic

scene more than the capturing of a fashion still. As opposed to these erotic tropes, her outward gaze is diverted from the camera, and her dreaminess is a hint at her presumably very young age. Her gestures and poses might equally evoke pin-up imagery and childhood playfulness: my contention here is that these two evocations of her presence on set can be woven together, and it is precisely in this ambiguity that the photo spread should be read.

5.5 Ambivalence, Opacity, Impenetrability

Within a stark studio setting with minimal props, Tollens seems to relinquish her own power as a photographer: her work, in fact, studies the feminine eroticism of young girls, who are not treated as mere sitters but rather are encouraged to be co-directors and the only characters of the scene. Tessel's "show" reflects the alternating rhythm of getting close to adult sexuality and retreating into a more "innocent" space of self-discovery. While in Guy Bourdin's photo shoots the child-sitters appear stuck in the atemporality of their sexualized childhood, here Tessel calls into question the proclivity to read the fashion model as acting in the service of a male photographic fantasy: she is elusive, and both her age and her sexuality make it hard to visually identify her. I have discussed earlier how the child has been historically constructed as a sentimental object and how in the 1990s the ad-driven fashion magazine contributed to the commercialization of the child-object: in this way, the "child of capitalism" (Wilson 1985: 13) became invested with adults' longings for social mobility and economic affirmation. Glossy magazines, operating as agents in the economy of normative fantasies, have tended to perpetuate such a discourse by portraying little girls and tweens as alluring instruments through which to feed consumer desire. Alternatively, *Dutch* has attempted to intervene in fashion media discourses on the "little girl" by starring Tessel as a child engaged in the negotiation of a non-submissive style of femininity. She can be read as refusing the pretense of coherence and integrity in regard to her own behavior and holding up the contradiction of looking just like a little a girl yet skillfully mastering the visual scripts of feminine seduction, eventually negotiating such a complexity in an intimate setting with her adult-friend photographer.

The shots that make up the photo spread look like video frames more than final, edited images composing a fashion editorial: the viewer is presented with fragments of what is

potentially an ongoing photographic documentation that connects the model's performance of childhood and adulthood. In this sense, the photo spread congeals a "non-event-like event"—an expression I derive from Sianne Ngai (2013), who uses it to describe ordinary, durative, and nondramatic experiences—in the very development of Tessel as a young woman, with her own desires and fantasies. Tollens's photos mobilize antithetical forces without steadily occupying or portraying a fixed position in relation to these forces: she sets in motion the ever-shifting and delicate dynamic of knowing and unknowing (someone else, i.e. the photographic subject, as well as oneself), familiarizing and defamiliarizing oneself with an object or a body, and in this motion a firm grasping of the photographic subject is ultimately never attained. I argue that this mobility reflects the ethics of the relational encounter between photographer (Tollens) and model (Tessel): here a feminine and potentially lesbian intimacy allows for the production of a scene where the child-model is neither reduced to fetishized object nor to abstract entity. Tessel is let free to fashion her own persona and experience the pleasure of using her body without a clear purpose (such as, for instance, signaling status or following the photographer's directions as in the *Vogue Paris* photo shoot).

Thanks to what I would call a "feminine contract" between photographer and model, or the "girl-empowering play of reciprocity" to borrow an expression used by Mavor (1995: 13; 29), Tollens and Tessel subtract the photo spread from a heterosexualizing gaze, attempting to reframe the fashion set as a performative site where the cross-generational photographer-model relation is refashioned as transitive and mutually enriching and the commercial aspect of fashion photography is pushed aside in favor of the unfolding of "live" experience on set. The fashion photo story "Juweeltje" can, thus, be seen as a space where an exchange of creative agency between photographer and child-model takes place: the photographer does not direct the model's movements on set and therefore does not exert her control over the sitter; rather, she helps create an intimate scene for the sitter in which to play and shape her own version of childhood, one that complicates the visual vocabulary of both the innocent and the sexualized little girl. Whereas in the *Vogue* shoot the models stared at the camera, almost confronting the adult viewer to test their innocence, Tessel is situated on a blurry threshold between childhood and adulthood, where things are, look, and feel less coded. Here the physical, stylistic and affective liminality inhabited by Tessel prompts a more intimate contact with the ambivalences, undertones, and nuances of the scene. The

aesthetic affect that choreographs the images animates the ambiguity of the young girl, who is available and yet reticent, daring and yet separate.

Feminist fashion theorist Ilya Parkins has observed that the scavenging of depictions of feminine indecipherability in the history of the visual culture of fashion allows us to dispute the conventional reading of feminized objects through a masculine gaze, for opacity is a register through which femininity can be performed as "excessive of conventional structures of gendered and sexualized meaning" (2014: 71). What I have referred to as inscrutability, ambiguity, and unknowability is summarized by Parkins as "relational opacity." She writes:

> What opacity does, by tripping up *both* the contemporary spectator and the researcher in our attempts at sense-making, is to open up the terrain of relation beyond the heteronormative economy that is presumed in the usual analysis of spectacular women, and allow us to think beyond, to think of other relations, often sensual relations […]. (2014: 70)

Parkins contends that the expectation of feminine legibility rests on a violently gendered rhetoric, one that seeks to penetrate and make women transparent; instead, opaque styles of presenting the feminine subject can counter ocularcentric epistemology, providing a more textured and non-heterosexual mediation of the feminine. Returning to my case study, "Juweeltje" can be read as twisting the ubiquitous trend of feminized spectacle that ties ideas of the little girl to consumer capitalism: by embodying a style of childhood femininity that trades in an erotics of ambiguity, Tessel performs the refusal to be made spectacle through a masculine gaze. The staging of feminine mediation that one encounters in "Juweltje" can also be taken as emblematic of the anxiety surrounding the very relationship that independent fashion image makers had with mass culture at the turn of the twenty-first century: while longing for a dissolution of identities and of the available visual rhetorics through which the masculine and the feminine are constructed, they still enlisted some conventionalized feminine tropes (such as, in this case study, the red lipstick, the black mini dress, and the gold jewelry) in their work.

Tessel is embodying neither the precocious seductiveness—which characterizes the aesthetic of children's fashion stories molded on adult shoots—nor the cute carefreeness that constructs the image of the happy innocent child. The myth of innocent childhood, along with its other face (sexualized childhood) is here visually complicated, insofar as the photographer is staging the scene of the experiential interval where the configuration of the child's

subjectivity is taking place, beyond the surveillance, regulation, or signification imposed by adulthood. I read the impenetrability of the child as a state that prevents the adult reader from "containing" the child, and thereby harnesses an epistemology of childhood that rests on creative indecipherability. The hazy atmosphere in which Tessel is immersed, the seeming undecidability of her child/adult aesthetic, and her general elusiveness forestall judgments that typically animate concerns surrounding childhood sexuality while, at the same time, implying the possibility of queer pleasures and fantasies. In other words, the stylistic disorientation operated by the photographer reframes the dynamic of spectatorship as a slippery undertaking bound to be frustrated in view of the viewer's inability to definitively work out Tessel's identity. As a result, the viewers may linger in their own limitation with respect to Tessel's vagueness, and perhaps grasp a sense of her unknowability. Like Tessel, we, as viewers, are left in an interval of incompletion from which, as often happens in the aesthetic experience with visual material, queerly productive moments could derive (Bruhm and Hurley 2004: xxi).

This idea resonates with Kevin Ohi's appeal to see queerness in children as "a resistance to containment in legible identity categories. [...] Children are queer because they thwart such comfortable self-recognitions," namely, the adults' fears about children's desires, as well as their own, and the serenity of (self-) understanding (2004: 81-84).[85] From this vantage, the photo shoot foregrounds the uncontainability of the child, hence soliciting in the viewers the recognition of the child as unconstrained from and resistant to the pretense of signification. In this sense, it can also be seen as subtly disquieting the ideologies of affective normativity embedded in the visual politics of more commercial imagery. What I have referred to as the queer unintelligibility and impenetrability of the child is phrased by Ohi in terms of "incommensurability": the idea of queerness as untenable and incommensurate in that it unsettles the structure of legibility underpinning the ideology of innocence, is congruent with Muñoz's Nancean theorization of queerness as the very sense of the incommensurate that exists as a potentiality (unpacked in Chapter 1).

[85] Ellis Hanson makes this same point (in more vivid tones, with his assertion "Children are queer"), arguing that children's behaviors, desires, and sexual knowledge undergo a normalizing scrutiny and surveillance that is similar to what sexual minorities endure, whereas the sexualized child is "a tabula rasa turned symptom or cipher of the spectator's desire" (2004: 110; 126).

As Tessel maintains her composure (her clothes are almost unaltered in the different shots), the viewer is left in the unknown. Her opacity calls into question our "mastery" of the photographed subject. Thus, the relationship between the viewer and the viewed is also affected: I argue that this unknowability of the ambiguous subject encourages an imaginative meaning-making practice that is bound to fail. The failure of making sense of the scene can inspire an intimate connection with these fashion images, where tarrying with ambivalence––that is, with Tessel's own ambivalence as well as, possibly, the viewer's own ambivalent relation to the images—is the interpretive end in itself. Ohi suggests that in literature desire can be triggered or announced through stylistic operations (for which he uses the formula "aesthetic rapture"): this happens when representability is sidelined to the advantage of style's capacity to convey affective intensities. Stylistic disorientations, or dislocations, might prepare the way for new manifold possibilities of feeling and desiring that "resonate with a queer troubling of representation itself" (Ohi 2005: 4-5). This points to the queer potential of emotional illegibility as a stylistic practice.

Applied to photography, and in particular to my case study, indeterminate affect functions in a way that troubles the narratives and representations of sexualized or infantilized childhood. Such discourses and images are normalizing, for they both, in different ways, serve to control the "difference" integral to childhood, as this difference could unnerve the mores and habits that sustain historically determined ideals. In other words, images like those in "Juweeltje" inspire a theoretical engagement with the figure of the child that invites the unlearning of our habituated modes of making sense of children's experience, and embraces, instead, an affective attentiveness to the alterity that might result from the child's creative process of self-formation.

Teresa de Lauretis has employed the idiom of eccentricity to account for the critical position of the "inappropriate/d other" (an expression coined by filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Min-ha) whose practices of affective and political displacement across identities and communities have the power to refigure a theoretical field (2007: 145). Shifting the idiom of eccentricity to the aesthetic domain, I characterize as "eccentric" those movements that exceed the verticality leading to adulthood and straight life. In mechanics, eccentric elements impede forward motion: they block an object, make it stutter, misdirect it and send it off course. The digressions propelled by eccentric movements are nevertheless generative. Thus, "eccentricity" might apply to the formative movements or tensions enabled by a host of

feelings that the child might not be able to name and work out, unless retrospectively. For instance, the turmoil of fear, curiosity and excitement that for the child might emerge in the act of cross-dressing or in sensual activities involving the body, can be understood as "eccentric" in the sense that this act takes the child "elsewhere," toward creative growth and potential transformation.

"Eccentric feelings," on the one hand, offset adults' attempts and tendency to discursively make sense of and therefore impoverish children's affective experience; on the other, they can instantiate for children the emergence of queer ways of experiencing the world. In my usage, eccentricity is a figural descriptor echoing models of "lateral agency" and "sideways growth" that Berlant and Stockton respectively resort to in order to envisage a scene of action at the outskirts of normativity. Eccentricity seems to me particularly apt, also in view of its figurative connotation of strangeness and unconventionality, especially when accounting for the act of stylization, or self-fashioning, that in fashion image-making can function symbolically toward a queer refiguring of subjectivity.

Tessel's "unproductive" hanging out on the set of the photo shoot is captured in stills that offer no obvious rational meaning. In the instance of her daydreaming or solitary boredom, she inconsistently stands, leans down, and sneers. In this temporality where nothing remarkable happens and no emotions are volitionally transmitted, the model-character stands for the inconclusiveness and unknowability of the transitional space she inhabits. The stuffed animals, which in the story are juxtaposed with shots of the model, may hint at what television and photography scholar Patricia Holland refers to as "the drama of transition between feminine sexuality and childhood" (2004: 193) and what I have described, instead, as a nondramatic event, or set of events, of which only a segment is visualized in the photo spread. The montage may also hint at Tessel's relationship with objects that are not simply material artifacts but placeholders for the fantasies and attachments of a young girl who seems aware of performing a femme, glamorous style of femininity. In the way it is figured in this photo spread, childhood does not forefront meanings, values, and affects that the adult viewers would expect to see transposed on the page. Instead, this kind of childhood might be read as a Winnicottian space of creative configuring of one's subjectivity in relation to the world: Tessel's daydreaming and her experimentation with clothing and postures carve out an indecipherable lag in which imagination and self-fashioning direct the possible orientations her life might take.

Tessel's look plays a pivotal role in blurring the sense-making process of what kind of figural meaning she might exude: in the fiction of the photo story, in fact, she might be wearing her mother's clothes to impersonate her either deliberately or unthinkingly; alternatively, those might be her own clothes, through which she expresses her bodily awareness and taste. In any case, she is not objectified or played around with by the photographer, but rather she is left free to inhabit the space and to move around as she pleases. The freedom of movement in fashion sittings is an aesthetic phenomenon that, in the previous chapter, I have interpreted as a suspension of the scripted postures of the fashion model as these have been historically constructed in the aesthetic economy of fashion since the 1920s. In this photo shoot specifically, however, it also relates to the intergenerational feminine pact between the adult-photographer and the child-model which refutes naming and signification.

The photographer and the model have created a scene in which the child performs the undecidability of her erotic disposition through clothing and postures that might be read as either naughty or gracious. Her looks and poses confound the legibility of the scene: they suggest affective modes of being which I have defined through the idiom of eccentricity in order to identify their dynamic excess when compared with more legible affective performances. Eccentricity is a quality of disorientation: it deviates from the center (a norm or aesthetic) and moves without being concretized in a status or a form, for it is always transitional and potentially multi-directional, and hence troubles fixity and linearity. In this photo shoot the child emerges as an ambiguous figure whose inconclusive movements bestow her with lateral, or eccentric, agency, namely with the capacity to interrupt expected neoliberal narratives of unidirectional growth through, in Berlant's terms, “roundabout movements” and “floating sideways” that flatten activity and production as modes of existence (2011a: 231; 116).

This photo shoot exposes the ability of the child to circumvent restrictive codes of existence and to gesture toward unpredictable ways of (dis-)orienting herself in the world. Jacques Rancière writes that, in the aesthetic regime, art practices undo the directionality and directedness of meaning in a lateral (and one could say oblique, or queer) gesture that opens up an aesthetic field wherein sensations and perceptions are indirect, indeterminate, “indifferent” (2011: 69). It is precisely in this condition of indeterminacy that Rancière identifies art's very emancipatory politics and that, in my interpretation, the indeterminate

figuring of the child in this case study expresses her queerness. Scenes of dissensus, as these are called by Rancière, consist of a drifting from pre-established meanings and logics that is instantiated by indeterminate affect, i.e. the disjointing of what is represented and what representation might provoke, or, in Rancière's own words, the "dissociation between what is seen and what is thought, what is thought and what is felt" (2011: 75).

In this optic, "Juweeltje," through an aesthetic orchestration of indeterminate affect, proposes a figuration of queer childhood that counters the narratives of innocence and sensuality discussed at the beginning of this chapter, hence challenging the conditions of possibility of what is said, seen, or felt through a fashion image (and, specifically, fashion images of children). Alongside the case studies in the previous two chapters, this provokes a break in the historical regime of fashion images, which have traditionally operated through clear-cut and legible feelings as a way to commercialize specific aesthetics. As I have discussed in the first chapter, the photographic image can be understood as an aesthetic event that partakes in the distribution of the sensible insofar as it may enunciate modes of being, feeling, and acting that dissemble the conditions of sensibility upon which the dominant culture is grafted. *Dutch* was indeed committed to the rewriting of the narrative of the child by swerving from dominant discourses and representations of childhood and, instead, casting the child as an agentic subject invested in imaginative possibilities of alternative presents and futures. In this regard, *Dutch* also betokened the possibility of novel modes of aesthetic subjectivization which counteracted the deterministic model of straightness reliant on a presumption of formal legibility.

The photo spreads discussed in this dissertation have evinced how the affective figurations provided by fashion images may invite in the viewer modes of responsiveness entailing interest, curiosity, and attention that defy the epistemological hegemony of transparency to which mainstream narratives are subsumed. I like to think of the fashion photographic narratives of the kind hereby analyzed as relational, for they prompt the viewer to confront complex and at times inscrutable modes of being in the world which, in turn, solicit malleable ways of interpreting and reconfiguring a certain scene, in contrast with the habituated modes of reading a fashion photographic image. The aesthetic and affective qualities of the images in these photo spreads reshuffle dominant imaginaries through idiosyncratic fantasies, rupturing solidified constellations of feelings and opening outward to visual landscapes in which multivalent political possibilities can be articulated.

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has sought to demonstrate how attending to affect is quintessential to conducting a queer analysis of fashion imagery, one that takes seriously the affective work of cultural producers and its implications with regard to how socio-cultural attitudes can be shaped by and through images. As Ben Highmore writes, "Moods and feelings don't just happen; they are produced, and most of the time their production is the result of specific work" (2017: 2). My approach was premised on the idea that fashion photographic images are media that partake in social life and form cultural imaginaries: they can, thus, be inhabited and can ultimately inspire a sensible reorientation toward social matters. In approaching the fashion image as a relational agent that can attune, by stimulating the senses, different viewers to a certain worldview or sensibility, I have claimed as its political role the affective recalibration of the relationship between readers-viewers and the social realm. This reassessment is made possible by the capacity of the fashion image to propose alternatives to the lived material present via the manufacturing of affective scenes that can bind us emotionally to alternative life configurations. Moreover, by enacting scenes that gesture toward other forms of life, fashion layouts might, borrowing from feminist theorist Teresa Brennan (2004), "transmit affect" by making us "feel atmospheres," attuning us to moods, and even exposing us to unknown features of our subjectivity.

Resting on such theoretical premises, my inquiry into the aesthetic rendering of queer affective registers in fashion photographic narratives produced at the turn of the twenty-first century has shown how issues of class, sexuality, and sociality were dealt with, in terms of visual (re-)presentation, by a team of fashion magazine producers whose work has been thus far neglected. It is precisely in the emergence and circulation of queer aesthetic feelings that I have identified the alteration of figural aspects of fashion, by which I mean the representational patterns that have historically governed fashion iconography. I have explored how at a particular historical juncture—beginning in the mid-1990s and continuing in the early 2000s—the fashion photo story became a ground for critical engagement with socio-cultural discourses from which fashion photography had been traditionally alienated: this happened through the staging of affective scenes suggesting ways of life that counteracted the repertoire of happy moods and aspirational appearances, a repertoire that

reproduces the visual field of fashion as a site of "positive projections of the future self" (McCracken 1993: 136).

Whereas fashion magazines have always constituted a space in which ideologies and collective belonging among readers are formed, their visual content has generally worked toward spurring consumer desire: in fact, while the written content of fashion publications has often engaged with current societal development, culture, and even politics, the photo spreads have served as an aesthetic connector with the market by means of displaying clothes that the reader would ultimately purchase or aspire to purchase. This does not imply, though, that fashion layouts have not been produced or consumed, respectively, by queer image makers and publics. As Elspeth H. Brown (2019) brings to light in her historical inquiry into fashion modeling, heteronormativity and queer counter-discourse were already laminated in the glamorous impersonal intimacy of mid-century fashion photography.

In the 1990s, the representational patterns through which heteronormative aesthetics and ideological assumptions had informed the visual culture of fashion came to be questioned by a coterie of magazine editors and image makers who were equally invested in fashion, music, art, and other cultural domains. The first wave of independent style magazines, such as *The Face* and *i-D,* had given expression in the 1980s to youth subcultures that understood fashion as another instrument for expressing a countercultural posture: they undermined, to a certain extent, the rituals of fashion image-making by offering a visual platform to street characters; however, their anti-fashion approach remained relatively estranged from queer concerns. Since the mid-1990s, *Dutch* magazine, despite not making any explicit counter-hegemonic claim or asserting absolute independence from the market, inflected fashion images with queer affect, relegating written discourses to secondary position, and deploying the fashion photographic narrative as a privileged vehicle for communicating and inspiring a dissenting relationship with those very objects and aesthetics in which the culture of fashion has been historically invested. By developing a visual language largely inspired by both cinema and documentary photography and devising rhetorical strategies through which to spotlight the affective complexity of the characters in the stories, the magazine presented subjects that could be perceived as morally problematic or simply unworthy of fashion representation. In so doing, it instigated in the audience of magazine readers queer modes of feeling through which an alternative relation to the world—one that, for instance, is predicated on neutrality, shamelessness, or ambiguity—could be imagined.

I have argued that the image makers responsible for the kind of fashion imagery that this dissertation discusses used the fashion photograph as a tool for affectively mobilizing queer outlooks on the world: they staged scenes of retreat from conventional modes of sociality (as shown in Chapter 3), from habitual ways of conforming one's demeanor to middle-class expectations (in Chapter 4) and from the social imperative to be readable (Chapter 5). These photographic narratives ultimately invited readers-viewers to renounce the scripts through which social life is regulated: scripts that, for instance, posit queer goth teenagers as alleged satanists, people on welfare as "low-life" and delinquent, and children as asexual. I have also argued that by producing queer imaginings, a fashion magazine like *Dutch* extricated desire from an attachment to normative fantasies and potentially enveloped its readers-viewers in a collective community of queer feeling. In this way, the coming-together of a Nancean community of feeling subjects through the encounter with images can be taken as having queer social value.

I have argued that the queer immaterial labor behind alternative fashion photography also involved the imagining of styles of masculine and feminine self-presentation that unanchored the model's body from "public sphere masculinities and femininities", that is, from the attachment to aesthetic conventions the repetition of which animates people's sense of social belonging (Berlant 2008a). Read through this queer optic, the models-characters in the narratives I have discussed embody an experience of elusion or refusal to become understood as "identities" and thereby complicate the kind of identificatory relation presumed in fashion magazine spectatorship. Highmore writes that fashion, and more specifically the feelings and tastes that drive it "articulate modes of identity and forms of dis-identification; and they render gender and sexuality as a form of visibility and as shared sets of sensitivities" (2016: 145-146). Shifting his understanding of fashion as a "process of *worlding*" to the fashion image in particular (or to fashion understood *as* image rather than, say, system or industry) and rethinking it based on the visual knowledge produced by the alternative fashion photography analyzed in this dissertation, it might be the case that the fashion image can also trouble the very coherence and legibility of the subject on display, breaking the promise that the reader-viewer will encounter a kind of aesthetic mediation that might be expected.

In addition to enacting visions of unfashionable masculinities and femininities that the viewer might be prompted to think about or incarnate vis-à-vis the glamorous ideality of the

commercial fashion image, the photographic narratives with which this dissertation has been concerned produced a visuality predicated on the stimulation of curiosity and interest, rather than on the spectator's desire to be or to become the image. Such visuality is constructed through repeated affective encounters with images that mobilize what art critic John Berger notably has called "ways of seeing" (1972); ways of seeing that, I contend, in the case of the objects under analysis here, ask the viewers to involve themselves with illegibility, provocation and ambiguity. As a result of this particular relation between the viewer and the viewed, the immersion of the viewer in the emotive content of the viewed (i.e. the photo story) lays the basis for a rethinking of the aesthetic experience of fashion magazine reading: an experience that does not consist in the kind of image consumption guided by the desire to embody a certain ideal and/or purchase the products promoted by the fashion model (products which are material, auratic placeholders for fantasies of glamour), but in a more nuanced, intimate and thoughtful engagement that takes place within a slower temporality wherein consumption is provisionally left out of the frame.

In *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), Rancière critiques self-proclaimed "political art" since in the attempt to teach the spectator through political messages, it relies on revolutionary ideologies without actually producing new political subjectivities; additionally, political art can also become enmeshed (like non-political art) into institutionalized cultural networks and market relations. Inspired by the idea that explicitly or self-identified political art might not be very political after all, my contention is that despite its imbrication with commerce and its partial integration into an established cultural industry *Dutch* did carry out political work insofar as in going against, or beyond, the conventional forms of visual fashion imagery it produced a more expansive conceptualization of that imagery through which cultural meanings and values are disseminated into popular culture. Although it would be farfetched to claim that *Dutch* produced new forms of political subjectivity, it did give visibility and legitimacy to themes and subjects that exceeded the boundaries of the fashionable and, in doing so, instructed fashion magazine publics to be more reflective in their engagement with fashion photographs, i.e. to think critically through and beyond the surface of fashion images.

With the economic conditions militating against the production of properly independent (or political) art and popular culture, engaging with commerce was, for *Dutch*, both inevitable and strategic. Perhaps precisely because *Dutch* tapped both into the

mainstream and the subcultural, its contradictory combination of the highest technical standards of design and photography and a rather trashy creative content became recognizable among style and fashion magazine readers, with numerous contemporary magazines attempting to emulate its aesthetic. I am inclined to suggest that it was due to this conflicted relationship with publicity and the industry more broadly—one that would come back to haunt the magazine, which was in fact discontinued as a result of disagreements with a new publisher tasked with financing it and expanding its market—that *Dutch*, situated as it was in a "publishing region located in-between the world of underground zines and that of mass-marketed magazines" (Andersson 2002: 8), managed to become an original point of reference in print fashion cultures. The legacy of *Dutch*, or at least its influence, is evidenced in a plethora of fashion magazines that emerged in the early 2000s, which range from the more "niche" and collectible Northern-European publications (such as the Danish *Dansk* [2002], whose name is a direct reference to *Dutch*, the Swedish *Acne Paper* [2005-], and the Dutch *Fantastic Man* [2005-]) to the more profit-oriented French and British ones (such as *Vogue Hommes International* [2008] and *Love* [2009]).

The "Dutch gay-interest fashion magazine printed on pink paper" *BUTT* (2001-) deserves at least a mention: founded by fashion publishers Gert Jonkers and Jop van Bennekom, it "aimed to make a virtue of the number of gay creatives involved in the fashion world, promoting a European aesthetic for making queer sensibilities visible in fashion photography that veered away from the look of American hetero 'porno chic'" (O'Neill 2017: 89). Published quarterly, in Amsterdam, in a pocket-size book format, it carries none of the characteristics of a fashion magazine, beyond its interest in the personalities of fashion creatives (with *Dutch*'s Matthias Vriens starring in a few issues), and takes inspiration from porn zines. Grittily displaying the naked bodies of scruffy and average-looking men of all ages (be they well-known artists, designers, porn actors, or strangers met in a club), accompanied by amusingly raunchy interviews revolving around personal sex anecdotes, *BUTT* absorbed *Dutch*'s affective queering of the fashion editorial genre and reframed it through a gay male erotics wherein the written and visual content cohere to create a kink anthology that trespasses editorial genres.

However, in the 2000s, with the formation of luxury holding companies (e.g. Prada Group and Gucci Group) and multinational corporations, gigantic conglomerates acquired an immense weight in relation to editorial publishing as they were capable of investing even

further in print advertising for publicity purposes. Today, photographers, stylists, and editors have less and less freedom in the making of fashion stories, and the possibility of shooting photo spreads with little or no clothing has become virtually unthinkable: the seasonal collections from the advertisers have to be featured in the spreads according to precise instructions (such as, for instance, not using clothes from different brands to style the same outfit), with the result that photo stories have become "advertorials." The relatively short history of *Dutch* encapsulated the conflicting energies between the encroachment of luxury conglomerates on the editorial publishing market and a partial creative independence and freedom that still allowed editors and image makers to conceive of fashion magazines as instruments that could produce forms of visual critique. The vast majority of print fashion magazines that appeared on the market in the 2000s have entirely embraced commerce by cultivating relationships with and deliberately appealing to fashion brands in order to secure financial backing: these magazines, far from being "independent" or "alternative," have been swiftly homogenized, indistinct from mainstream publications and have often been absorbed by larger media companies.

Angela McRobbie, in her latest work on labor and precarity in the fashion industry takes as a pivotal moment the crisis of employment in 2008 to unpack how creativity has come to function as just a set of "skills" that fashion intermediaries need to possess in order to participate in the labor market: as an ideological effect, "the romance of being creative" (2016: 33) has become a new *dispositif* of governmentality. She is especially harsh toward "avant-garde fashion and style magazines," as she argues:

> *Dazed and Confused*, *Tank*, *Another* and *Love* ride on a tide of masculine hipster kudos, which relishes the opportunity to endorse an anti-political correctness ethos, and which entails a disavowal of feminism as old-fashioned, and holds at bay, editorially, any notion of serious ethical or political engagement, in favour of being ahead of trends, being in touch with the kind of attitude that will eventually translate into consumer lifestyles. (2016: 33)

McRobbie's critique is salient for it points to how the creative editorial teams (among the other professionals working in the creative industries) have slowly embraced "the ideological role of creativity" in order to participate fully in the cultural economy, and it brings into focus how the discourse on creativity has become embedded in neoliberal logics of cultural production.

However, with the near disappearance of any distinction between mainstream and countercultural tendencies in the visual culture of fashion, the role that fashion magazines have played in the aesthetic production of queer knowledge has thus far remained unexplored. The 1990s and (early) 2000s have been judged a period in which any attempt to expand the taxonomies of fashion representation by fashion magazines was ineffective and apolitical: in other words, a failed posture that did nothing to change the disinterested, anti-feminist stance of fashion magazines toward social issues (McRobbie 1998: 154). These analyses, coming primarily from the field of sociology, have failed, in my view, to unpack the visual discourses circulating in this period in less commercial arenas, or how certain affective styles of representation and modes of co-production with models have come into being, and have not disambiguated the cultural histories and trajectories of the various players operating in the field (with the result that, for instance, a magazine like *Dutch* has been ignored).

My dissertation has aimed to fill this gap by embarking on a work of affective investigation, or ungrounding, of queer tendencies in the archives of alternative fashion photography, focusing specifically on a historical moment in which independent image makers were striving to carve out for themselves a space of partial emancipation from the market. In a time of late capitalism in which individuality, choice, and self-determination were promoted as imperative values for progressive fashionability, photographic narratives circulated by alternative publications became a site for collectively reimagining the confines of fashion representation and for connecting image makers and magazine readers in their shared disalignment from the normative fantasies stoked by the system of fashion. In making the case for the alternative fashion magazine as a repository of queer feelings and critical gestures, my research project opens the way for the writing of a queer history of fashion magazine culture.

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